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LUCA SARTO



"What think you of it, Mademoiselle? Is it not a pretty building?"

LUCA SARTO

A NOVEL

A HISTORY OF HIS PERILOUS JOURNEY
INTO FRANCE IN THE YEAR FOUR-
TEEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-ONE

BY
CHARLES S. BROOKS



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LUCA SARTO

THREE TAPS UPON THE BOARDS

A NIGHT of May in the year fourteen hundred and seventy-one begins these adventures in France; not my first adventure, or my last; but of interest, for therein I bandied words with a king, and later tripped his royal legs when it served me. I descended, too, into the dungeons at Loches, where his enemies were rotting—and I was to have been of them had his purpose carried. And here am I safe in Italy, albeit even after these ten years the dungeon's smell still festers in my nostrils. Few men besides myself have gone down the winding steps, have seen the cage where Cardinal Balue whines all day and night, have felt the damp of underground, and still have returned to the upper world to breathe the wind of it.

I issued from these adventures with credit. And yet there was one rogue in France, a certain Tristan, the King's headsman, a dirty fellow flecked with warts, who rolled me in the mire and soiled my lace, and he to my shame still lives.

Of others who gainstood me, there are two, as I recall, dead by my sword. But my memory in petty matters is not precise. I keep no tapster's score with chalk.

In these adventures, while I do profess me to God that I tell the general truth, yet I'll not haggle on all lesser points. There is a prudish scholar who strains upon minutiae, measuring his facts, as it were, with so careful thumb that he besmirches them. Such will plot a city to an inch, as if it were a book for pilgrims. Or he wracks himself whether there were five buttons precisely on the King's shift, and whether his poke hung by a silken thread and the color of it. Or if a slightest point in history is forgotten—whether it was of a Tuesday that the Queen came of a jaundice—he squints within a dozen folios for a certain reckoning. When the body is dead and wrapped, it's best to go off on other business and not pry within the cerecloth.

Counter to him, there is the writer who tosses you a sentence with no slightest heed to its truth or falsity. If there is a jig and cadence in the words, it is enough. It matters not to him how he mislead you by his looseness. He flavors a lie, as it were with tiny pinch of truth, as salt

from can, to give it the taste and tang of verity. If such a writer is set upon by two men, he puts it roundly five, not braggingly to swell himself, but for the deeper zest of him who reads; for the blood stirs more when the odds are great.

I who write these memoirs am of neither kind. When the matter is of import, I shall hold to the hair-line, so that a scholar may gloss his approval in the margin. Yet in trivial matter I shall allow myself a touch of fancy. It may gratify me, now and then, to throw in an extra oath to spice my page. Or I shall take credit to myself for an instant wit, snapped to the occasion, whereas in truth the words have come to me stale when their use was past.

Nor shall I always hold myself to exact description, so that you shall know the very turn of road where my adventures chanced. If you now enter Loches and seek the stairs where I trailed the lady in the dark, you will have to put a deal of questions. I would as leave a dog kept barking at my heels as that you should whine upon my footsteps. You will be monstrous empty before you smell the bakeshop where I fell upon a brawl, I've so mixed the streets.

It were nature, maybe, that you go poking to

the dungeons to find the iron grating that the King looked through when he badgered Jacques; yet there too I shall twist you up. To this very day I can see his grinning face between the irons. Wit enough had King Louis—wit to spare until he tried it on Mademoiselle Diane. It was ash then. Sarto is no youngling. His beard is not raw with youth. It has sprouted beyond an easy plucking. Chance these many years has been up and down with him. Yet the memory of this occasion sits deep, with rats gnawing in the passage and water dripping from the walls. You'll find that mine is not a tale for candle-light: For if the night wind slaps a shutter while you read, it will set you in a boggle and you'll not sleep thereafter.

I'll not have my affairs like a shrine for mumbling pilgrims. If you think I have left a sign post, it's up awry, purposely to lead you off. I'll not be held to petty inquisition, like a peddler in a fair with cloths to sell. But in the bigger reckoning you can swear upon me as on a Bible.

Sarto has read the chroniclers—Froissart for one—for it is fitting that a man who would write his own memoirs should ground himself in gen-

eral history. And yet—although there are cunning facts to be got from him—on the whole he likes not this Froissart. For he writes too much of war. One would think that the fair lands of Europe, to a finger's space, had been bruised and trenched with strife. And yet with a song water is carried from the well and cattle low in peace and on many a twilight the quiet kettle sings. The country songs are naught to Froissart, nor the greetings at the crossroads, nor the friendly cackle at the wayside booth where cross and saint are sold. Tra-la la-la-la! Youth comes wooing across the fields, and there was never yet a comely lass who was not kissed in moonlight. Her lips, since the first winking of the stars, have been an eager target. Her smile spins the lonely compass into port. Pilgrims limp upon the windy hills and count her kiss the journey's end. But Froissart is blind to all this sweeter traffic of the earth. He writes of broil alone—crackling bombards and conspiracy and siege. Only when the city tumbles does he find his satisfaction.

Sarto is of better guidance. Ladies are fairest in the spring—jewel and brooch, silk and velvet, an inch of stocking, a bare shoulder in the candle-

light. If Sarto does not give these space to your content, he 'll eat sop for a month in penance.

And here he is writing of a France that rumbled with the quarrels of Burgundy and Brittany, also of the white-faced, thin-shanked Guienne—a shriveling, this Guienne, though begot of a king and born four-posted in a palace with a queen in labor—all these, mark you, quarreling against King Louis; until later the smudge blows to open war. And yet Sarto does not prate too long of conspiracy. He throws off, as it were, the cover from the pot and shows you how the mess seethes and boils, but then he claps it on again and does not scald you with the heated fumes.

For this is no prattle of the great. Not one man shall I lug across my pages because there are orders on his breast, or because his stocking is held by a king's garter. Louis the king I must have, for he is a part of my plot. But these others—God's patience—no! I'll not have Dunois, although he is a gallant soldier and would grieve on reading my book to think I'd slighted him. For he holds me as a friend.

And I'll not have Commynes, despite that he admires me, and when I saw him last he drank a health to me—it was a rare vintage—yet de-

spite his greasy compliment I mistrust him much. He shifts his allegiance too often. First he's lapped and petted by the Duke of Burgundy. Then like a shrewd wanton he sells his favors to the King. He turns east or west, or north or south, and like a windmill he obeys the quick advantage of the wind. Charles the Bold, too—a forthright fellow with a roaring voice and thick strong legs—him I shall leave among the Switzers. We shall hear him bawling, but at a distance.

Nor is a woman's smile a passport to my notice. Now and then, as it pleases me, I may throw a lively wrench across my page, just to pass my cup or strap my boots. Or if she be worthy I'll kiss her behind a curtain. But she will be no more than a trinket and bauble in my book. Of ladies I shall show you only one.

In this tale I shall please myself. If I wish a man to limp, he'll limp at a nod from me. When I want a villain, I'll draw him black beyond the use of nature. 'Fore God, I'll smutch him deep, that you be in no doubt. You know me now.

We shall see, when all is done, how a man fled wisely from his enemies, the Orsini; how he came to France; how later, in good time, he

wooed and kissed a lady; how, after a night that was candled by stars and danger, the morning sun was witness to their betrothal. I end with priest and blessing. No need of candle then.

And therefore, if you are not content with what I shall play before you, good e'en to you before we start. I'll have no one sitting by, yawning between his fingers and gazing around empty upon the walls. To any such his twenty centimes will be returned at the wicket. A common juggler will keep him best from nodding.

Are you set—and are you hushed? I'll now tap thrice upon the boards, as is the players' custom, and draw the curtain.

CHAPTER I

THE WAY THE FOOLERY STARTS

I 'LL start my history in the murk. A May night begins it—a wet night with water in the gutters and rain against the stones. There was a shrill wind this night, the last of the noisy brood of March, which rattled the doors upon the street and slapped the shutters where it found them loose. One would think that the wind had been bibbling since the noon and was now abroad like a drunken reveler on a night of carnival. Were any traveler still upon the street he might expect the swaggering fellow to pluck his coat-tails and swish them in his eyes, or to push him from the wall if he turned a corner sharp. Whereat, the wind went off with saucy tune in search of other winds as drunken as itself, to play their pranks together until the dawn. Yet it was no night for revelry other than the wind's, for it was cold and sharp with dampness. To the west, although the sun had been down but a little while, the sky was already blanketed

for the night, as if it had gone to bed for warmth and had drawn the gray covers to its chin.

Into Rouen there had come jolting this night a traveling carriage, while as yet it was hardly dark. It was a lumbering vehicle, slopped with mire, and was hung on straps to ease it in the ruts. In front was a box for the one who drove, with space for another servant at his side. It was a noisy hulk upon the cobbles, and the rumble of it was loud enough to draw a deaf grandam from the settle. As for the passengers it carried, if you had looked hard at it through the dusk you would have seen women's faces at the window, peering out curiously now as they rattle through the town. Mademoiselle Diane Motier and Madame Corday are journeying from Boulogne to Paris, and they will spend the night here at Rouen.

If you will now take a map and will lay your finger on the English Channel at the strait of Dover, you will find Boulogne. This is where the journey had begun two days since. Beauvais lies on the direct road to Paris, and the carriage in order to make Rouen had been forced to sheer off the shorter road. It cost a day, for the roads were heavy, yet Mademoiselle and Madame had insisted, although it appeared that both of

them were in haste to arrive at Paris and chafed even on a change of horses. When the driver had pointed out how it cranked their course, Mademoiselle had answered shortly that a view of the cathedral was worth the time. There was a holy nail to kiss.

In Rouen, Jocelyn's inn is of best repute. It is not of fair prospect, being set on a narrow street. It is not the fellow of an Italian inn, yet will do for France. A serving man ran off to fetch Jocelyn, leaving a wench to undo the ladies' wraps. There hung a map upon the wall. Mademoiselle drew Madame to it. She sunk her voice so that it fell short of the wench's ear. "See," she said, "how the road from west Normandy comes in!"

And Madame nodded to it. "I trust he comes to-night," she said. "I shall fret until our news is handed on."

"Ay, Madame," Mademoiselle replied. "We fetch yeast for the cooking. It will stir our rawness and blow the cover from the pot."

To this Madame agreed, but put her fingers on her lips, for the wench hung near with itching ears.

At last, when the inn was settled for the night, there did come a man off the west Norman road.

He beat upon the door, although the hour was late and lights were out. Jocelyn, who kept the inn, turned twice in his bed before he gave heed, disjoining the racket from his dreams. Then as the thumping on the door kept up and the whole inn was being roused, he put his fat legs outside the coverings, muttering the while whether honest men could still be up at such an hour. But it was a fellow from the stable who made answer to the summons, blinking through a crack of the outside door and rubbing his knees together to get warmth in them, for they showed beneath his shift and were pimpled with the cold. The wench, too, who had undone the ladies' wraps, put her head from an upper window, with her hair loose upon the casement, and her garment clutched at the throat against the rawness.

So the horseman came in. And Mademoiselle met him on the stairs with a candle, wearing such shift as ladies wear in their own rooms, yet stockinged and in full modesty. Behind her on the landing stood Madame Corday. Mademoiselle shaded the light against the gust and gave a cry of eagerness when she saw him. It appeared to the wench, who lagged behind a curtain and later gossiped of the affair, that she had been

expecting him. But the wench saw little and would not have known the man again, for her own attire was scant, and the wind so twitched her garment from her legs that she dodged behind a door when he came up the stairs. The two ladies and this man were closeted an hour. When he left, it was without turning his head upon the stairs—a parting most unlike a lover, the wench thought, for her head had been busy with the matter and she could find no other explanation.

He came down three steps at a time and jerked his cap close upon his ears. But he did not so much as look back upon Mademoiselle, though she was a pretty picture on the landing, with the candle held above her head so that her arm was bare and with one toe peeping from her sandal like an adventuring mouse.

He slammed the outside door. Back again he went on the road to western Normandy. It was strange business, and late—for the nunnery bell gave the hour. It was the same wench who let him out—she had smocked herself the while—and she gossiped of it with Jules the stable boy over the embers of the kitchen fire, but both were doubtful as to the meaning of it. If the man had been her lover, it was a cold greeting for his

journey. He had but kissed her fingers, which is a slim ritual for love. And a lover does not thump and bawl before a door until he rouse the house. Rather, he comes softly and taps only with his finger tips. These thoughts from the wench, who knew love, in a fashion. Jules had given the man a change of horses and took in payment a silver coin. He and the wench fumbled it in the light that came off the hearth, but it was unknown to them.

Mademoiselle made no mention at breakfast of the night's interruption, although Jocelyn hinted for an explanation as he served them. "A noisy night, my lady," he said. "I had just dropped off—" And much more as he fetched the dishes. Sharp after breakfast, Mademoiselle and Madame cloaked themselves for the journey. The driver asked them if they wished to visit the cathedral, to which Mademoiselle said, "To Paris, with all speed!"

It was two nights beyond Rouen that Mademoiselle's carriage entered Saint Denis, which is a mere speck upon the map, a thumb's distance out of Paris.

The inn of best commodity in Saint Denis is called the Seven Stars. On the steps of the inn

was the landlord, holding down his apron lest the wind snatch him naked, and tilting his head to meet the blast. At the first rumble of the wheels inside the yard he had kicked a blaze upon the hearth, for the loudness of the wheels bespoke wealth, as traveling carriages are rare. Mayhap it was some one of the court. At this pleasing thought, his mind sought out a very bottle in his cellar. It was to be hoped that the spiders had been diligent, for a cobweb would pop the price to silver.

Yet now his hopes went down, for he got no further than to say that there had gone a stew upon the fire, by 'r Lady, that would "make a traveler's tongue waggle with hunger," when Mademoiselle hushed him with a request for only a change of horses. At this the driver blurted that horses' legs would serve their present purpose better than a leg of lamb, no matter what the garnish. It was an old and sorry jest that was stale in Paris.

Once Mademoiselle put her head to the window of the carriage. The landlord was bustling in the yard. "What is the time?" she asked.

"An hour, full, beyond sunset. It's a thievish hour, good lady. We've most uncommon beds."

"How far do you make it to Paris—to the Porte Saint Honoré?"

"Ah, Mademoiselle, it is a sorry bit. Two hours at best—with sloughs that make it bad by night. It is shorter by day and safer from the thieves. Just last week," he persisted, "a traveler's throat was cut."

He said this last with a gesture toward the glow of the hearth fire, for he had craftily set the door ajar. Comfort is a fair siren.

Mademoiselle's mind was set on Paris, and she waved him off. The harnessing was done. The driver cracked his whip and scattered the stable boys. Out they swept from the yard.

The night had fallen black. The only light, except for a rare window, came from the lantern between the wheels.

They were well on their way to Paris before either spoke. Madame Corday first. "Diane," she said, "John of Bourbon must sit late for us to-night."

"Ay, Madame. But it will be less than an hour now."

"And Duke Francis," Madame Corday continued; "do you think by now he has our message?"

"Brittany, Madame, is far off, yet it's likely."

There was silence for a moment.

"Diane, we move on ice."

"We must take care, then, that we do not slip." This from Mademoiselle.

They entered Paris by the Porte Saint Honoré, a gloomy pile with not a light upon its face. And yet the gate was not closed. It gaped blackly. One would have thought the hulk were sound asleep and that its jaw had fallen open.

A king's archer, who had been screening himself from the wind behind a buttress, ordered them to stop. He mounted the step and thrust a lantern inside the carriage with a demand for papers.

"'Mademoiselle Diane Motier and Madame Corday,'" he read, scratching his head to stir his ingenuity, for he was an imperfect scholar. "You and you!" pointing with his dirty finger. "And you travel from Boulogne to Paris, with a stop at Rouen. Motier—Motier?" He repeated the name slowly, as though it stirred his memory. Then he turned his back and bawled to the guardroom.

Another archer appeared, but of better rank, and shoved the other from the steps. This second

archer looked at the papers, paused a bit, then smirked with a show of manner. "Mademoiselle and Madame are safe returned, I trust," was all he said. He held up the light and thrust it in their faces. He then peered into the corners of the carriage, withdrew his light and clambered from the step. "It is enough," he said. "Drive on!"

If Mademoiselle had turned sharply as her horses started and had looked through the window at the back, she would have noticed that this archer, who but a moment since had grinned his farewell to her, was now nowhere to be seen. Light came from the guardroom door, yet the man was not in the range of it.

There was, however, a new shadow from the lantern between the wheels, a daub of black upon the pavement, as though some one were swinging by the knees, head down, from the straps beneath.

Yet Mademoiselle was unaware that she had taken on another passenger.

The carriage had gone scarcely two hundred paces and had come to the thicker mesh of streets, when on a sharp turn a wheel sunk into a deeper rut than common in the cobbles. Partly it was the jolt and partly it was the weight of

the rogue who swung beneath, but whichever was the cause the great strap snapped and the carriage pitched upon its side.

Madame Corday was the first on her feet. "God's wounds!" she cried; "here is bad business!" Then in a lower tone to Mademoiselle, "John of Bourbon will fret for our coming."

Marcel the driver was nosing at the wheel. Mademoiselle called to him. "Marcel," she asked, "what is the time of night?"

"Oh, lady, as shrewdly as I can guess it lacks three hours of midnight."

"And how far do you make it to the Hôtel Bourbon? Is it fit going afoot?"

Marcel scratched his head. "No, lady, it's half the width of Paris. It would not be safe." He hesitated and glanced along the dark house fronts. "It's likely that there is a leather merchant hereabouts. If I had a leather thong I could mend the strap."

"Marcel," said Mademoiselle, "we are pushed for time. How long will it take?"

"A half hour, lady." He wrung the water from his hat. "Fie, what a night! I must find a place for Madame and Mademoiselle to sit." He called the lackey to him. "Stand you here,

boy! There is a glimmer down the lane. Some one is not yet a-bed. If the house looks well, I'll ask for shelter."

The ladies waited under the cover of a pent roof, hard against the wall. It was plain they chafed at the delay. Mademoiselle's restless toe kept tapping at the pavement. "Madame," she said, "John of Bourbon will fret at our delay."

Madame nodded, but held her tongue.

It was several minutes before Marcel returned, and then he brought a man with him. By the lightness of his step he was young, by the flash of the lantern he was handsome—no mincing prettiness for kissing in the moonlight, but a bold, straight nose and a cheek that was browned in the sun. He was wrapped in a great cloak against any further discovery of his person. He came in front of the ladies, and after the briefest glance bowed low to Mademoiselle. "Ah, Madame and Mademoiselle are good to a poor artist." It was a pleasant voice touched with an accent that was not French. "They honor my poor roof. Perchance the name of Luca Sarto is known to you? It is my own, Mademoiselle. I am an Italian artist living now in Paris—paintings—goldwork—a poet, in a fashion, when the wind is

south. Ah, I hoped that Mademoiselle had heard of me. My thanks, dear lady. So foul a night—the wind! It races to catch the winds of winter. Mother of God, it's ill that you stand here in the rain. Hell itself blows raw in March. Come, my fire blazes! You will see how snug it is inside."

Then, as the ladies hesitated, "Come," he added. "It's on these windy nights that witches are abroad. They ride on goats to a devil's sabbath. It's an ill sight to catch one against the moon. Will Mademoiselle be careful of the pools in our broken pavement!"

With another courtly bow he led the way, and Madame and Mademoiselle followed.

But presently Madame Corday plucked Mademoiselle's sleeve and drew her back. "Will John of Bourbon wait?" she whispered.

"Ay, Madame, he will. Our message cracks his enemies. But keep silent before this Italian!"

Meanwhile, lest you be curious to know whether the rascal who swung upon the strap broke his neck in the jounce, I'll tell you short that his neck did not so break. In the bawling and pickle of the accident he got off in the darkness and no one even saw him go.

CHAPTER II

STAIN OF BLOOD

HERE is a leap. I choose to draw your notice back to Italy and to recite those things that concern me in a proper order. And first, as you know, it is Luca Sarto who writes, which should be enough for introduction, as the meanest pilgrim into Rome has stood agape before my canvasses. But how comes it that to France I went adventuring? France is a far-off land, and the Alps stand between. Nor has it gold to offer like the kingdoms of the East.

It was a quarrel to avenge a comrade that sent me traveling. Giovanni, who is one of the Orsini, had murdered my friend Andrea. And I, coming on Giovanni in my anger when his fingers were still red, slew him in payment. As the Orsini are powerful, a pother was raised, and I fled to France. Yet, of a truth, in me was a wandering spirit apt for pretext. It is cobblers only that can always sit at home. There is nobler itch in Sarto. If a man were not made

to walk about and see the whole fair earth, of what use is such cunning jointry in his legs? Yet I was a fugitive with a warrant over me.

Now mark the exact manner of this quarrel and flight!

In the spring of fourteen seventy-one my revered friend Francesco della Rovere was cardinal-priest of Saint Pietro in Vincoli, yet his ambition still ranged. The title and the office were but a ladder for his eager foot. In years he was fifty-seven—twenty-eight years older than myself—a man of learning, and heads wagged yet over his “Precious Blood,” recently put forth. Such things are far from me. I read its title page, then went out and hummed a tune. But scholars liked it and bleared their eyes on it.

In the spring of fourteen seventy-one, infirmities were coming hard on the Pope, Paul II. Whereat talk buzzed concerning his successor. With this buzzing, lay heed to this, Cardinal Rovere’s ears were tickling, for his ambition lay that way.

Rovere had a nephew, Andrea—of my own age. He was in the lust of youth, and it was a gay and painted world he saw. His throat was dry, his ear alert for the flapping of a petticoat. And for

a time I followed his lead. If a pretty woman smiled I pushed for an advantage. The dainty creatures are prudes at noon, yet by persuasion in the dusk they mend their stiffness. Nor did I spare the bottle. This is a time to be slighted over, for in it I became a toss-pot. And yet, in this respect, I was much like other men.

This young Andrea was a man much gone in drink, with lewdness in his eye—a man apt for tryst and whistle, pudgy of wit in the dawn, and yet with a wineish sparkle when the lights were lit. But still some fascination held me to him.

And now a word of these Orsini. A mere flick of notice, for of all the Roman families this is the best known and the strongest. If you go back a thousand years you'll find the Orsini in high office, both of church and state. And always you will find them proud of race, insolent, and pricking for quarrel. So, when Cardinal Rovere's name was hummed about as a successor to Pope Paul, they showed a deal of scorn that one who had been a poor Franciscan, and whose family came from nothing, should have such soaring thoughts. Was Peter's chair, they said, no better than a roadside bench for the sunning of a beggar monk? One of the Orsini, they

thought, would wear better the triple crown. Any bachelor of the family could stretch his toe with easier grace for a pilgrim's kiss.

Consider Andrea now, Rovere's nephew, a young blade who tried to put himself in fashion, who tagged his cuffs with lace and dangled on society—my friend, God help him! With what slight the Orsini looked on him—whelped, they sneered, at a peddler's bench! Andrea bore it by biting on his nails, yet his spleen mounted.

Andrea and I and many others, including certain of the Orsini, and, in particular, this Giovanni, prefect of Rome, had gone to dine on invitation at the vineyards at Trastevere. To me the Orsini made a show of warmth, for they smirk and fawn on genius. But to Andrea they were, as usual, sullen, as if a common fellow had got in to breathe their air. As this cooling did not freeze him, presently they fell to an amused contempt—a lifting of the eyebrows. Such banter and wit as they passed him across the table stung with deep malice. Andrea had borne their scorn before, but to-night it chafed him beyond the common. Presently his noisy tongue broke loose. He cried out to Giovanni that when Cardinal Rovere had been made pope,

Giovanni would find himself without an office, for he—Nephew Andrea—coveted the post of prefect.

It was a fool who made the boast. Wit must be met by wit, not anger. Finally I plucked him to his chair. Giovanni reddened, bit his lip, but lapsed to sullenness. Thus went a stormy evening. At last I prevailed on Andrea to leave. First he swore an oath he would not; then 'fore God, he would, for there were swine at table, he said. So he left, but in going he let slip an hour and place where he had appointed a meeting with some woman. He shook his fist toward Giovanni. "I go to better company," he said. I clapped him on the mouth and led him off. It was a scowling room we left.

We came into Rome, traversing the Ponte quarter. Here Andrea said he was not returning to his house, as he was going elsewhere for his amusement. At the word he was gone, and I came on alone. I was three quarters out of liquor and steady in the legs and wit, and I kept a tolerable course across the city. It was early, as it had passed midnight by not more than an hour. There were several hours to rustle in, if one had the mind, before the crowing of the cock.

And now I was coming near where lived a certain courtezan named Fulvia. Another hundred steps, it was so near, would have brought me to the lights, when behind in the darkness I heard horses.

I stepped aside and drew me close, and as the horsemen passed I peered at them. One was Giovanni, the same with whom Andrea had quarreled. Me he saw not. He stopped at Fulvia's door and ran in. I paused. At the window were lights, and there was a sound of merriment. Then I went in, for I had no quarrel with Giovanni.

On the threshold I met Messer Gabino. He is one who admires me much, and so he stopped. "Sarto," he cried, and loosed a stream of praise upon me for a Madonna that I had then but finished. But I hushed him up, for repetition makes praise tiresome. As I was poking here and there, to see what company was about, again I saw Giovanni. He was in earnest talk with one they call Jacopo, but, as I approached, he masked his mouth with his hands and looked hard through me. Jacopo I knew, and, knowing, liked him not, for he is a rogue who sells himself when vile work is needed. He has been a glove that has

kept blood from staining many a gentleman's hand. And you have an enemy, he'll find occasion, if you but whisper the name and meet his price.

"Oh, ho," I thought, and knew that mischief was afoot. But not deeply did I mark it then, nor harness it with Andrea, for such things are frequent, and one cannot always be starting with excitement.

I sat down and ordered red wine and a board of chess men. I was puzzling on the moves that check the rey and was pushing my castles here and there, mumbling to myself, when a bit of easy lace and powder perched on the arm of my chair.

"Monsieur," she said, and put her fingers in my beard to get my attention.

"Honey love," I answered roughly, "I'm hard in thought." And I pushed her off.

But she was a pretty painted thing with bare white shoulder. God knows I am no churl. I took her on my knee. "What now, my dear?" I said, when I had made her comfortable.

But she was serious. "Monsieur," she whispered in my ear, "I fear that there is trouble for to-night."

"And how?" I asked.

Whereupon she told me that she had shared a bottle of wine with Jacopo but a half hour since and that Giovanni had come by. He had dropped the name of Andrea while talking with Jacopo, and then had named a street and house. This was in low talk, and yet she had heard. "There will be foulness on the streets to-night," was her ending.

I jumped up, everything sorting with what she had said, and ran out. There might still be time. I knew the house where Andrea had gone, and it was there I went. There were no lights showing, nor had I thought there would be. There was no need of taper for his entertainment. I had no desire to thump upon the door, and rouse him from his punkling. Nor did I wish to wait like a footman. I was irresolute on the step, when I heard the sound of voices at a distance on the river bank. I saw men moving there.

On the chance that they might be Giovanni and his crew, I drew my sword for readiness and slipped along in the shadow of the buildings in their direction. I came quite close and peered upon them, undiscovered, from a recess. A white horse stood with hind quarters to the water, and on the very margin were three men. As I looked,

one of them pointed to the stream, where a dark object showed in the shallow water. It was Giovanni who turned and faced me. "It's ill, Sarto," he said, "that you come here to-night."

"It's ill," I cried, "when three curs pitch upon one man. Do I see Andrea's body?"

"The fellow's insult stung," said Giovanni.

"You pestered him and got your due."

Giovanni grinned. "And Andrea got his," he said. "But make way, Sarto! I've no quarrel with you."

"So?" I cried. I stepped forward quickly and slapped his cheek.

Giovanni angered and cried out. "I've given one swimming lesson here to-night, Sarto, but I'll give another while my hand is in."

He drew his sword and lunged upon me. I parried the thrust. Then I drove against him until I forced him to the water's edge. There was never yet an Orsini that could fight with Sarto, and I struck him down. His two companions had gone running at the first touch. This happened near the bridge of Saint Angelo, where scavengers discharge refuse in the river.

Near by was a boat tied to the bank, and on

top of a load of timber lay a fellow upon his back. I shook him and found that he was awake. He was a boatman and had been crouching there against discovery. I questioned him. He had been awakened, so he said, by the coming of a man. First this man had looked all about as though to make sure that no one was near. Then the man made a sign. Whereupon from a narrow street alongside the Hospital of San Girolamo two men led a horse. Across the crupper hung the body of a man, the head dangling one way, the feet the other. Backing the horse to the river, two of the men took the body, head and feet, and with a great swing flung it far out into the stream. It was a dirty bit of work, he said, but so often such things happened on the bank that it would not have disturbed his rest. As long as a body is fresh dead, he said, it mattered not.

Now things came tumbling in my brain. Giovanni and Jacopo had come on Andrea somewhere on the streets, and my friend was dead. But Giovanni was dead, too. The anger of the Orsini would not soon cool. I had lighted a hot fire. It would singe me if I stayed about. I must set upon my travels.

I went to Cardinal Rovere—Andrea's uncle—and burst upon him as he was bent upon his writing. With my grief I wracked his ears. It was in the dawn that I hurried out of Rome, bound for France.

CHAPTER III

A MOUNTAIN JOURNEY

IN the dawn we set out for France—I and my faithful servant Michel. I had ample gold to meet the cost of the journey and I took also certain drawings of my goldwork, on the chance that I might set up a shop in Paris. These drawings I wrapped in an extra shift, together with hose, against breakage and raveling. I tossed the bundle to Michel to tie upon his saddle. The gold I secured myself. Also I took a letter which Cardinal Rovere had written for me to King Louis XI of France. “King Louis,” he had said, “is a niggard to the arts, but he has a long nose for the Papacy. Doubtless a rumor has already got to France how Paul declines in health, and the same rumor sets me up. You may be sure that Louis will not skimp his welcome.” It seemed sound reasoning, and I stuffed the letter carefully in my boot.

I mounted and beckoned to Michel to follow me. Knowing his honesty, I told him what had

chanced the night before. He gave a long whistle. "The Orsini? His kinsmen will be testy. Will they not follow us?"

"It's likely enough," I answered. "We must n't lag. When danger clucks at the reins, it's well to trot."

Michel rode for a while in silence. But if a tongue is hung for babbling like Michel's, it needs but a jounce to start it. "Master," he said, "where is this Paris where we go? I've heard of the place, but I know not where it is."

"Dunce!" I said, and gestured loosely to the north and west. "Have you no learning? It's beyond Milan and beyond Bern—two weeks at least. It's hard against the western ocean. Methinks it's on the sea."

As yet scarcely any one in Rome was abroad for the day. We had now come to the edge of the city and were passing a chemist's shop, where a fellow was taking down the shutters for the day. "Michel," I said, "see if they keep flint-wort in the shop and bring out six ounces of it! It's chillish, mayhap, in France, and the apothecaries there may not have these simples."

We were a mile beyond the shop when I noticed that one of the coins which Michel had

taken in change was clipped. I showed it to him upon my palm. "Michel," I said, "the dishonest whelp has cheated you."

Michel was hot with anger and he fumbled with his dagger. "I'll score him off," he blurted.

"Peace, gull!" I said. "It's a good mile back. I can repair the loss. I'll pass the coin at dinner."

We trotted on.

It's a lean journey into France. On the fourth night we came to Milan. God knows that I am no centaur. We had come pelting here so fast that I was horse-sore. Rubbed myself with greasy stuff to ease my joints. Tossed all night. Up early next day, fretted with my bed. To lay my peevishness—for I had been snapped at all night by bugs—I bought myself a red brocade fresh from Constantinople, much the fashion. I wound it about my waist and let the tasseled ends hang down along my leg. I tricked myself dainty and walked around the town. Sarto is a pretty figure. A lady smiled at me from a case-ment, but her nose was snub and I kept upon my way. Here at Milan we lay off a day, while I bought myself a sword of the Negroli. No tidings of the Orsini.

The next night we lay on the shore of Como, having traveled in a drench all day. I hung my garments at the kitchen stove and put my boots beneath the oven, rousing out a sleepy cat. "Has the flood come again?" I asked. "Forty such days and we'd need an ark."

The inn-keeper was gloomy. "It drowns our crops," he said. "There's a usurer, a Jew, lately buried in consecrated ground. It's rained since they laid him in."

"You'll get no sun until he's rotted," I answered.

But the inn-keeper brightened. "It is not so," he said. "There is a party formed to-night to dig up the corpse and toss it across the fence. Tomorrow the wind will shift."

He set out spaghetti and tomatoes. I threw back my head and made a meal.

I know not how many days lie between Milan and Bern, but I do know that these long days in the saddle were not to my stomach. They pinched my eagerness and set me gazing with sullen thoughts across my horse's tail toward Rome, which is the city of my heart. Had Paradise been beyond a forward turn with angels piping, I would still have been indifferent.

Gaston de Foix in his book commends men to riding. Whoso rides, he says, flees from the seven deadly sins and comes to Paradise. If this be so, Sarto is now seven jouncing days at least on the road to his salvation.

The country of the Switzers is awesome. The mountains peep at heaven. There's snow laid by to stock the winter for a thousand years. Michel is a sorry gawk with craning up his neck.

It was after many days with sweat and dirt upon them, and flea-bit nights, that we came to the monastery of Father Paul. This merits more than a word. It stands in a high valley. Long before sight of it, I knew its nearness by the clappering of its bell. For an hour I had traveled at the sound. The bell was of marvelous soft tongue. Such clappering puts me in a pious mood. There was an older time, far back, when men were not mad with whirl and stir. It was in such quieter age these bells were cast.

A sweeter mood came on me. I crossed myself and clucked to my horse, for we were at last come upon the level of the monastery, with a brawling stream below us. We now went all four ways upon the crooked road. It was nearly

sunset, and my shadow galloped on ahead, impatient of my pilgrim's pace.

There was the sweat of a weary day on me, scarce dried now in the colder evening wind. I knew what foul inns are commonly met in this mountain country. And here was a smoke arising from the kitchen chimney of a monastery. Spits and kettles were down below hissing with the dinner, and smell of stew and herb. Plates were set up to warm. There were sheep, too, upon the hillside, and to my mind came a hot fancy of a leg of lamb with taste of caper. Also, where thistles grew so thick, there must be a drink concocted of them. It's no true monk, who cannot distil nectar from a wayside weed. His thirsty legs have searched the mountains. Man is divine, God knows, yet when twilight falls it's his belly that sings praise the loudest. When the night creeps up, I make a steaming dish my altar. If there be any *Pater Noster*, it is short. And if the meat is savory—lest my spoon be hurried—I hold the *Nunc Dimittis* off an hour.

I followed my shadow through the convent gate.

A monk appeared, with *Deo Gratias* at sight of me; for it is the pleasing custom on the alighting of a stranger, to offer thanks that it is permitted

to serve his needs. Then he ran off to find the abbot; not fast, for fatness had left him but a waddle. It was good token of the food.

The monks were just back from the fields and now had gone to the refectory. They are the white monks, called the Cistercian. The refectory was quite distant, yet I could hear the jostling of their knives and the Latin that was read to them.

A brother hospitaller now led off my horse, also Michel and his. As for myself, Father Paul sent greetings, with request that I seek him, where he pruned his hedges.

Now it lies in the heart of this history that King Louis of France was a spider, and that he practiced later his spider's ways on Sarto. That Sarto came off safe was the result of his wit and skill, but also it resulted from his knowledge of spiders. This knowledge Sarto got from Father Paul while he pruned his hedge. Of the garden spiders, he learned, it's the young only that spin their webs by day. When paunched and wise with years, they spin in the dark, secretly, that their victims may be unaware what snares are laid across the thoroughfares of night.

This from Father Paul. Before this lesson, I

had looked upon the spider without abhorrence of its villainy, but merely as a nasty bug with wonder, chiefly, why Noah had let it on the ark. If Noah had been more careful on the sailing day what animals were coming up the plank, there's many a pest would have been drowned. A certain pest that bit me in the inns is horrid witness to Noah's lack of care.

I found Father Paul beside his hedge, but, before I could utter a word of food or bed, he drew me to his rosemary and bade me see the enginery of his spiders. They spin before dusk, the younger ones, and every day for many years Father Paul had watched them, cramming his head with minute observation.

"Your banded spider," he began, holding me empty-stomached to his words, "fills a space of about four palms' width." Whereat he stretched forth his brown hands. "At random, it appears to spin, darting here and there, touching one point and then another. And yet, behold its web, made to a nicety and planned, *Mon Dieu*, with deadly certainty."

And yet, athwart my zeal for knowledge, there came from an open kitchen door the sound of frying onions. At this my attention sagged.

Here was a siren. There was need of thick stuffing for the ears to keep such temptation from their crannies. And though to Father Paul's words I tried to lash myself, like Ulysses to his mast, still it was kitchenwards I cocked my ear. Though I had been born brother to Ulysses, such sounds had set me wavering.

But thus much I learned: The spider that is crafty spins his web by night, and behind its random masonry is premeditated guile.

You will mark later how Louis, King of France, spread his web.

It was only a few days after leaving the monastery of Father Paul that we turned an elbow of the mountains and saw the country of France stretched below us in the sun. Besançon—Dijon—Tonnerre—Joigny—a few cities out of many—Sens—still we plodded on.

"Michel," I said, "where does this Paris skulk? It is a foolish thing that a city should set itself so far off when idle land is nearer Italy." I bade him look to my doublet. "I'm fouled like a thief. I'm falling into tatters. My purse grows limp like a dog's ear."

And now at last we came to Paris. So low were our fortunes fallen by this time that we were

forced to range about the city to find lodging inside our means. Finally, when it was already dark on the second day of search we took a room in a poor lane along the river. "We'll sell our horses on the morrow, Michel, and get me a cloak and doublet. I cannot go to King Louis like a beggar. Good e'en, my lad. To-night I'll sleep."

CHAPTER IV

THE KING'S FAVOR

ON the third day after my arrival in Paris I sought King Louis. I was amazed by the foulness of the palace, for my expectation was tuned by the magnificence of Rome. I handed Cardinal Rovere's letter to a chamberlain with a request that he give it to the King to read. The chamberlain, who was a dirty fellow, bespittled down his front, tapped the letter questioningly. There was not much silver in my poke, but I rattled it. "If I get a fair answer," I said, "we shall all profit." The chamberlain grinned and bore the letter off.

I set myself to wait upon a bench that ran along the wall. There were a dozen others, mean fellows for the most part. However, as I was myself smirched with travel, despite my new cloak and doublet, I may have appeared no better; although I could have smelled no worse. Indeed, as every one but myself was old and broken, we looked not unlike a row of pensioners

outside a holy-house; needing to complete the picture only pans and baskets for the bread and broken meats to be given out. It was a rare occasion when our members changed. At such times, when one moved out or another in, it was as if a slight ripple went over our company, which otherwise was as scummed and stagnant as a pool.

At intervals an attendant appeared, and just so often I complained of the delay. It's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.

For three mornings I sat there until my legs twitched with impatience, and then my answer came. The chamberlain entered the room as I was nodding.

"Luca Sarto?" he asked.

"What few bones are left," I replied. "The meat's gone off."

"A message from the King." At this he handed me a scroll.

He smirked and displayed his yellow teeth.

"Methinks," I answered sourly, "I'm bid to dine. I'm smutched for company, but I accept." The message, however, was above my hope.

There was much flourish at the start of the scroll, which I mumbled through, but the kernel was this: On me—an artist of whom he heard

great things, and also a friend of Cardinal Rovere to whom he sent his kindest greetings (*amico nostro carissimo*)—on me the King was pleased to confer a building known as the Palais Saint Louis, as a workshop and a lodgment, in the hope that I might consider Paris as my home. And for the ovens and jewels that I would need in my work as goldsmith, his treasurer would give me gold.

I turned to the chamberlain for an explanation of my sudden fortune, for it was even beyond my hope. His grin was proof that I had come into the favor of the King.

“This Palais Saint Louis?” I asked; “what is it?”

“An ancient building,” he replied, “that even now was the home of Oliver de Bourges.”

“Do I move in on top of this Oliver? Are we to sleep two a-bed?” I asked.

“You ’ll not see Oliver. He has gone off.”

The chamberlain now gave me a purse. Yet itch was so written on his face, that I gave him back two pieces from it. Also I gave coins to the pensioners on the bench, as a comrade should who has come to fortune. I left them grinning on their palms.

The chamberlain and I set out together to find my new home. However, as my stomach was queasy for food—I had been rumbling like a wagon on a bridge—we went by way of a certain bakeshop where, that morning when I had lacked their price, I had seen dainties displayed. I have a tooth for sweets and I stuffed me full.

Around the corner from this bakeshop is the Rue Saint Honoré, a broad street with merchants' wares upon it. Being now so opulent I went into one shop to inquire for a cloth that hung in the window—it was a fine red that would have set me off—but the chamberlain was so sour upon the delay and fretted so while I squinted on the fabric, that I marked the place for a later visit, and came off.

I did, however, leave my measure for a pair of boots. "'Fore God," I said, for the chamberlain was biting on his nails and spitting them about, while he nagged me to hurry, "'fore God, you'd have me barefoot on the cobbles. It will take but a moment to get the markings of my foot."

We soon turned down the Rue de la Petite Maison, at the end of which we found the Palais Saint Louis. It is a narrow street with Gothic

buildings falling forward on it. I've seen dogs run as devious a course, thrusting their noses into courtyards and down steps to cellar doors, sniffing for the city's offal. Of a truth, to get the smell of the street a dog's nose is not needed on a wettish night.

I found, however, the Palais Saint Louis conformable to my needs, though large beyond necessity. Of chief value was a great room on the ground level, where already I marked the place where my ovens would stand. Beyond this room lay others suitable for my bedroom and for that of Michel. Were other servants needed, or artizans for my work, they might perch upstairs. Having expressed my satisfaction to the chamberlain, who all this while tagged me at the elbow, I arranged with him to send to the sty where Michel was to be found.

The rest of the day I went about in the business of getting ovens made. It is cunning work as a slattern will foul them. Also, I sought out jewels and metals and what prices were asked. Here the King's treasurer was of service and helped me to a number of rubies and emeralds of good quality. Nor did I forget how smirched I was. I had pinched myself when I bought

the cloak and doublet, so I gave them to Michel. To replace them I went among the better shops and ordered new clothes of a plum color. Also, I bought the red fabric that I told you of—edging the merchant off a bit—and left it to be cut and fitted to me. It would set me off on Sundays.

So tricked, I would walk jaunty again. A sloven coat begets a sloven mood, and if one would bear a swashing havior, he must be dressed to fit. An oath, too, has little fierceness, if there is not a fresh feather in the hat; so I bought me one of flaring yellow and tipped it across my shoulder. So dressed I sought a mirror. “Sarto, you dog,” I thought, “you’ve looks. ’ Faith, you’ve looks.”

On my return from the shops, Michel informed me that the same chamberlain who had lodged me had come again, and he had removed certain clothes and property of Oliver de Bourges, the former tenant.

“Was Oliver with him,” I asked, “in the packing?”

“No,” Michel replied. “It was a cart load, all tumbled in. Oliver, they say, has gone from town.”

"Then it was hardly manners," I said. "They had best waited for his return. But I am glad the gear is gone."

It was this same night that I heard again of Oliver. Having finished my ovens at the twilight, I dismissed the workmen and bade Michel to clear the rubbish while I was gone for dinner. There is a cook-shop in the Rue Saint Antoine, and the old cook set out a gammon of bacon before me.

My stomach is commodiously good, although I am not one to glut myself with rumps and pinions. (Too much meat sets me to dream.) Yet this night my work had so hungered me that I put the gammon in a sorry plight. I am partial to salt cates, and I had these too. At the next table were Frenchmen. Mark this! Here was I, hungry like a gourmand, yet nice in my eating. Yet these Frenchmen, although they dressed in fashion, did smear their fingers in their sauces. And they ate so immoderately that the sound of it went about the room.

I was fretting with their manners, when I chanced to overhear their talk.

"Oliver is monstrous sour," said one.

"Ay, and with good cause," said a second.

"The Italian had best look to himself," said the third.

I put down my knife and listened. By bad luck the last speaker's next words were fouled by his food. Then I heard again.

"Oliver is a rare swordsman, and the King's disfavor, they say, has put him in a temper."

The talk sheered off to other matters. Presently they paid their reckoning and left the cook-shop.

"So—so," I thought, "I have already made an enemy. I must look sharp lest this fellow, whose name is Oliver, catch me unaware."

I made an end of my food, wiped my teeth upon a napkin, paid down my money, and came away.

When I returned, I found that Michel had cleared the disorder of the room and had lighted a fire. The night had fallen wet and cold, but it was snug within. Bidding Michel to employ his leisure in arranging the kitchen and putting away the food that I had bought—for it was my intention to eat but one meal a day outside—I set myself on a bench, unbuttoned myself, and stretched my feet to the fire-dogs.

I had not gone beyond a yawn or so—a half hour maybe—when of a sudden there was a loud rattling at the street door. “A visitor!” I cried, and reached for my slippers which, for my comfort, I had put off. “Michel, see who knocks!”

I drew my sword and laid it in reach across the table.

CHAPTER V

FROM OUT THE DARK

IT was a servant who appeared in the doorway, and with him came a breath of damp wind that teased the candle. His haste broke his errand to bits in the telling. His mistress, he stammered, the Lady Diane Motier, in returning to Paris from a journey, had met with accident in the near-by Rue Saint Honoré. Would I give her shelter until her carriage could be fixed?

I threw a cloak about me and bade the fellow show the way. At the door Michel stopped me. He coughed and plucked my sleeve. Then, putting his head close to mine, he whispered, "Master, have a care! Remember what you heard in the cook-shop!" He slipped my knife within my belt. I laughed at his warning and tweaked his ear, but I kept the knife, as it was now two hours beyond the sunset and the streets were dark.

At the corner of the Rue Saint Honoré the carriage stood disabled, having pitched against the curb when a strap was broken. The travelers

were ranged in a row beneath a pent roof—two ladies and one other servant. Folk, too, were coming from their homes, buttoning themselves on their steps, and gaping as if it were a cart and players.

I pushed my way to the younger lady and, making a deeper bow than common that she might know my gentle condition, I offered my shelter.

“Mademoiselle,” I said, “hell itself blows raw in March. The four blessed angels that hold the winds have all let go. Come, ladies, my fire blazes!”

I gave my name, too, and was pleased, although not surprised, that Mademoiselle had heard of me and my goldwork. My fame, it seems, had been of longer breath than I and had passed before me on the mountain slopes. Then setting the servants at their task and telling them where they could find a leather merchant—for a thong was needed to splice the strap—I led the ladies off.

In the blaze of my fire I first saw my guests. Madame Corday was the elder—a woman of forty with a nurse’s figure, although cord and artifice had done their best—well enough, maybe, in

her looks, but not one to hold a bachelor's gaze. The other was the Lady Diane Motier, possibly of twenty years, but seemingly no older than our sixteen-year Italian women. I have seen since her portrait by Ghirlandajo in the gallery at Amboise. To this I prefer my own memory as she sat in my firelight. It will suffice that her hair was yellow like ripened straw, her eyes blue, and her profile delicate beyond the nicety even of Italian words. "God," I thought, "she is a comely creature." And I smoothed my doublet.

Michel now laid a cloth and put on a salad. To my right I put the Lady Diane, for so the firelight fell best upon her face. I let Madame Corday drink her wine in shadow.

By the way the ladies attacked the salad, it appeared they had had no dinner. In consequence I sent Michel to rummage in the pantry and to bring out such cold meats and pasties as he found. Meanwhile, as the ladies were so content with their feeding, I held quiet until a lull should come. Once only Madame Corday spoke. It was of some incident in their journey. At this Mademoiselle laughed. It was a pretty sound and served as music to the feast. But

furthermore, it recalled to me a memory from Italy. A flick and word upon it.

I have painted the saints, but I am no hooded Puritan. It is enough and too much that Savonarola, like a dull gray thread, should cross the gay woof of life. I painted a Madonna once by flaring light. (It was in Italy several years before these French adventures—and in spring-time, when thoughts fly out the window.) And there came from the night outside a woman's laugh set to the sound of a tinkling cithern. And, God's wounds, while on the street below pleasure went laughing on its way, I forgot it was the gray-clad woman that I painted: So with colors I tipped my brushes, and my Madonna's lips I parted with the laughter that I had heard upon the street.

And now this French girl's laugh has recalled the other. In that there is no special wonder. But mark this, for here is a strangeness beyond the six days' usage! This French girl's face resembles the Madonna that I painted. Her hair was the same color of ripened straw, and her eyes, also, were blue. Smile if you will at such a fancy, and yet set it not aside, for it will happen that consequence will come from it. Should you for-

get it, later in the pinch of danger, you will be turning back to these early pages for a clue.

And now there came a lull.

"You have lived in Paris but a few days, Monsieur Sarto," Mademoiselle began. "You see that we know of your affairs."

I bowed at her speech with modesty that my poor reputation, after jolting through the country's dust, should find in Paris here so fair a hostel as this lady's thoughts. "Ah, Mademoiselle," I concluded, "in Paris I am misprized and underset, because the French still look at art with lack of relish. In Rome every one knows me. All who walk the streets nudge one another as I pass. 'Look at Sarto,' they say, 'who goes to dine with the Cardinal.'"

The Lady Diane smiled at my outburst, but she spoke with pique at the disfavor I had shown to France. "And now it is feared you are too well known in Rome," she said.

"A point, Mademoiselle!" I cried. "Your rapier touches me. I see you know what took me out of Italy. Cardinal Rovere and I are friends. I could not do less than avenge his nephew. Michel, you'll pass Mademoiselle the pasty."

Then I turned the talk, for blood is a bad ap-

petizer for food. By way of compliment—for in me lies a weakness for a pretty phrase—I told her that I had fetched the same sword along, and that the use of it was hers for the asking. Such offers, of course, are the coinage of courtesy. They are as far from real intent as fish from nuts.

The Lady Diane became grave, and I thought that she looked at me in searching fashion. “Monsieur,” she asked, “is now for the first time in France?”

“My very first,” I answered.

But Mademoiselle tossed her head as if to dismiss a thought. There was, too, an exchange of glances between her and Madame Corday. For a moment I paused, if perchance this secret commerce might bring forth words. But issue having failed, I spoke again.

“I can offer you but meager hospitality, yet Michel toasts cheese to a turn. Will Madame have a bit? I’ve been here but a bare three days, and it takes longer than that to set up even a bachelor.” Then I added: “By chance you may know Oliver de Bourges. The house was his.”

“His!” exclaimed Madame Corday. “That sets the matter right. I thought I knew this

room. I was here once, Diane, as you know, when Oliver lived here. It was six years ago."

"Is this Oliver," I interposed, "so fierce? He has sworn he will pink me for usurping him. In fact, when your servant came rattling my door, I thought it might be Oliver to begin a quarrel." I pointed to my sword. "If he proves a ruffler, here is my answer."

Madame Corday's face clouded, and she pointed to the door, which was open to the night. Before I closed it I peered into the street and listened, for a sharp-set ear is worth a suit of chain. There was no sound but the fall of the rain, except it was the watchman's round, and his whining cry, "By Christ's Sepulchre, all 's safe." Then I came back to the table.

Madame Corday turned to the Lady Diane. "You have heard of this room?" Whereat the girl nodded, yet, chiefly, her assent was but curiosity for what Madame Corday was about to say.

Again spoke the woman in the shadow. "To this room, Diane, I came one night, six years ago, to meet your brother and Oliver."

Then the woman in the firelight: "It is strange, that on this night of all others we should happen to be here again." But quickly the

shadowed woman silenced her. For myself, I wondered what, unchecked, she would have said. Their words had been commonplace enough, yet something lurked in the unspoken shadows. It's a plague to feel that something is in the air and that you know not what it is. Here was Madame Corday shaking her finger and shuffling with her feet.

"This night of all others." Mademoiselle had stressed the words. But I knew nothing of the horseman who had gone riding from Rouen, nor of Duke John who was sitting late in Paris, nor of the King's archer who swung between the wheels. These things, had I known it, were the first patter of a storm.

Mademoiselle was the first to speak. "So Oliver has threatened you?" Then in a moment: "Why should the King of France be so careless of offending Oliver? There are other buildings suited to your lodgment. It's plain why the King honors you. You are an artist, and, what's more, a friend of Rovere. But the King stirs Oliver against you. I have myself no answer, Monsieur Sarto, but we move in dangerous times."

We fell to silence. Suddenly Madame Corday spoke. "Did Oliver ever visit you, Monsieur

Sarto?" Whereat my answer "no" served as kindling to her thoughts. Presently she asked, "Did Oliver himself move his gear?" She seemed tense for my answer.

"Of a truth, Madame, I'm told he was not in Paris at the time. Oliver had not so much as a servant present."

Madame Corday was about to reply—then hesitated. At last, as though with effort, she spoke. "Monsieur Sarto, I am about to ask an unusual request. I wish to visit the room that was once Oliver's bedroom. I wish to go alone."

"Assuredly, Madame," was my reply, and yet my lifted eyebrows must have showed surprise.

With a feeling of the greatest curiosity I lighted a taper, and stepped to the door of the anteroom that leads to my own room. "It is the second room beyond," I said.

Madame Corday held out her hand for the light. "I must go alone," was all she said.

I allowed her to pass, and she drew the door closed behind her, although it nearly caught my intruding nose. I turned with a question upon the Lady Diane, who stood within the firelight.

It was fear—of a certainty, it was fear I saw upon her face.

CHAPTER VI

A TREASURE IN THE CUPBOARD

“WELL, Mademoiselle,” I cried, “what is this business?” But the Lady Diane stood listening without reply.

“It concerns me or my brother,” she said at length. She paused. “It concerns, maybe, the night six years ago when Madame Corday came here of a visit. That happened before I came to Paris. I am of Burgundy.”

“What does Madame seek?” I persisted.

“That’s what I’m trying to think,” she replied. “Something of Oliver’s left in the moving; some paper of import, it is likely. But I know not what.”

We were standing meantime with our eyes on the door through which Madame Corday had gone, as though it were a curtain of a raree-show that was about to start. Yet it was more than a penny curiosity that held us. It was plain that Mademoiselle was as puzzled as I. But presently a lock of hair slipped off her ear and dangled prettily.

I turned upon my heel. The fire was burning ill, for the wet wood steamed at the ends. Rain, also, splattered down the chimney. To mend the trouble, I lifted a log from the box, and was about to throw it on. I stopped half way.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "perhaps you heard a sound?" I rested the log upon the hearth, and waved a gesture toward the street.

She turned her regard as I indicated. "There 's rain outside," she replied, "and I get the sound of some one in the street. Naught else."

My own ear had caught the sound. There were light steps upon the flags before the door. I would not have thought of it except that Madame Corday had wrought upon me by her dark behavior. She had stirred me, not exactly to a boggle—God's face, Sarto is not one to go pale if there comes a squeaking in the night—yet, of a truth, her strange actions had set me on my edge.

I told Michel to stop his clatter with the dishes, and I listened. Then putting my finger on my lips, I went a tip-toe to the street door and put my ear upon it.

On a sudden I jerked it open.

I know not what I had expected. Oliver

maybe. But I was mistaken. As the door flew open, a man, who had been crouching there, pitched forward on his face. He was dressed as a king's archer, but was so slopped with mud that the original cloth scarce showed. He sprawled upon the floor, and his bonnet rolled off. It was when he tried to raise himself that his trouble appeared. His legs wobbled and there was a silly grin upon his face. He leered at me and Mademoiselle. He was soused with drink.

Once up, he lifted a finger and waggled it at us. His speech was thick. Michel had set down the dishes and needed but a nod to seize the fellow. I held the door open and he pitched him to the gutter.

I turned to offer amends to Mademoiselle. She stopped me at the first word. "Monsieur Sarto," she said, "perhaps you noticed that the fellow was an archer of the King."

"A sot is a sot, dear lady. This is not a tavern. He mistook the door. He'll have no memory of the place to-morrow."

Michel rested his pan of dishes on the table. "Master," he said, "may I speak a word? The fellow was as sober as myself."

"Eh?"

"There was no smell of liquor on his breath."

"There is proof at hand," I cried. "If drunk, he 'll still be lying in the gutter."

I ran to the door and looked out. By the light from the doorway I saw that the gutter was empty. If drunk, the fellow had been spry, for there was no sound of him. He had cleared the corner like a hound. Yet what did it matter? He was meddling on my doorstep and he had met a just reception.

I set the bolts. If there were other rufflers on the street, drunk or sober, they had best stay out.

The fact that the fellow had made off—although it seemed a good riddance—troubled Mademoiselle. And for reasons not known to me, she fretted with it. She gave me no more than a monosyllable, and sulked by the fire against all my efforts.

This lady's eyes are blue. Heigho! Tra-la! Cuckoo, jug-jug! Sarto, you fool, methinks the spring is here.

It was scarcely five minutes before Madame Corday reappeared. She came empty-handed and bore a look of annoyance.

"Madame," I asked, laughing, "did you find a

treasure? Shall we search the cupboard now?"

But Madame would not share my jest. She offered no word of explanation, nor could I see that she exchanged any sign with the Lady Diane.

And now Mademoiselle was obviously fretting at her delay. Twice she looked from the window. "What think you, Madame?" she asked, "It grows late."

But their servant came at last to the door. The carriage had been fixed. It was but manners that I accompanied the ladies down the lane and put them inside it. As I was shutting the door of the vehicle, Mademoiselle stayed me.

"Your servant seems a shrewd fellow," she said. "Do you think the archer was sober?"

"It's likely enough," I replied.

She paused. "Monsieur, it was a jest, methinks, when you offered us your help?"

"Dear lady, I spoke no jest. Once this might have been a jest, but time has made it serious."

"One short hour?" she answered, smiling, but she was not displeased.

She extended her fingers, and I kissed them. "For what you have done to-night, thanks," she said. "I shall keep your kindness in my

memory." She hesitated. "Later I shall ask occasion to thank you better." She closed the door and the vehicle started.

The Rue Saint Honoré still showed a few lights, and I waited to see the carriage out of sight. At the corner where there would be the last of it, was a glare from a window. Perchance, if Mademoiselle were gracious enough to wave her kerchief I would see it when they turned.

The carriage neared the corner and came in the flare of light. It turned and made off to the left. But no kerchief showed. I observed, however, that at a distance behind the carriage and in the shadow of the buildings, the figure of a man followed after. Presently it came under the light. All cats may be gray at night, yet, of a sureness, it was the muddled archer, for I saw his bonnet bobbing on his head.

The carriage and the archer passed from sight, leaving me biting my lips with indecision. But there was naught that I could do. I could not overtake them. Nor could I find them, as I knew not the way they went. Furthermore, there were two servants on the carriage, if the archer contrived mischief. So I came away.

Michel was waiting outside my door. It

seemed that he had been puzzling with the thought of the intruder. As I came up, he stood with his back close against the door. "It's so," he said, "that one gets protection from the rain."

"What of it?" I asked.

Michel shrugged his shoulders. "Did you mark," he asked, "that the fellow fell forward on his face?"

"And what of it?" I asked.

"This, Master; that if the fellow were standing here to keep dry, he would have fallen on his back when you jerked the door open."

"So? What is your thought upon it?"

"I think, Master, that the fellow came to listen."

"Why should a king's archer spy on Sarto?"

A shrewd look came to Michel's face. "Mayhap," he said, "it was on Mademoiselle he came to spy."

But I was not minded to discuss the matter further and, although he was bursting with his theories, I dismissed him for the night. He turned on the threshold. "Master," he said, "may I have another word?"

I nodded. "Be brief!"

"You'll hear of this mademoiselle again," he

said. Then he scratched his head and went off mumbling to himself.

When he was gone, however, my mind did revert to the strange things that had happened in the evening. Putting aside further thought of the muddled archer, whose coming I still could not but think was a piece of chance quite unrelated either with myself or these lady visitors, I quested back to the other events.

Was it not an ill fortune that the King by his gift of the Palais Saint Louis had roused a ruffler against me? Oliver, I had been told, was a man of consequence. He controlled a faction much needed by the King. Yet it was said that the King grudged him his favors, and would overthrow him when matters ripened to occasion. There were many buildings in Paris suited to my purpose, and yet I had got Oliver's. Was it the King's purpose to set us snapping at each other? If matters came to violence, how would it affect the issue? If I were struck down unaware, it would give the King the chance to weep upon my wrongs, and also a proper pretext to throw Oliver out of favor. Nor would the King grieve if I killed Oliver. Both sides of the coin were heads. Ah, me! The question was too deep. Or were

the Orsini concerned to pitch me in a brawl?

I was curious to learn what Madame Corday had sought in Oliver's bedroom. A chair had been moved from the wall, and a tapestry was awry. But there were no other marks of search. I might as well have looked for Prester John, for my quest was without results.

"It was six years ago," I mused, "when this Madame Corday paid her former visit! That brings it to the year fourteen sixty-five."

Fourteen sixty-five? Great things had happened in that year in France, the whiff and scent of which had crossed the Alps. It had been the time of the Common Weal, when the great vassals of Louis had rebelled. It had been a year of broil. The battle of Montl'héry had been fought outside Paris, with Count Charles of Burgundy against the King—July 16, 1465. Later there had been a peace cobbled between Louis and the barons. So far my ponderings got, and no further, except that the Lady Diane was a Burgundian, and that Burgundy had always felt sourness toward the King.

I put out all the candles save one. Then I laid aside my jacket of blue sarcenet, which I had bought of a shopkeeper on the Seine, and, setting

myself on the bench, with feet to the fire-dogs, I lost myself in thought.

My thoughts at night fly back to Italy. Me-thinks that when a flight of birds goes off within the twilight, it is the thoughts of exiles winging home. I sat thus during a candle inch. Then I took down my copy of "*La Vita Nuova*." It is not a smeared and printed book from Mainz, but is copied fair in cloister, and enlumined like a psalter. I read until Paris sank to the monotone of the rain—for the wind had fallen. And so until the taper flickered and it was midnight. Then I closed the book, and put it carefully under my extra quilt on the shelf, so that it would be safe from dust, and groped my way to bed.

I dreamed that I painted in a stone room, with flaring light, and heard through the night a woman's laugh that was made of the metal whereof the stars are compounded. But through my dreams there was a kind of fear, impalpable and strange. I cannot tell you more, except that the woman's laughter, on a sudden, turned to ice, and that I awoke clammy at the change. The bells of Notre Dame were ringing across Paris at the time, and one was cracked and flat. Then I slept again.

CHAPTER VII

I AM SUMMONED TO THE KING

IT was late when I awoke. The storm had cleared and sunlight slanted between the buildings. Here was May come at last. A south wind brought rumors of the fragrant earth.

As I had now my ovens set up and had bought the hammers that my work required, I was desirous of making some beautiful ornament which I might present to the King. It would serve as a mark of gratitude and might bring me such favorable notice as would better my fame and fortune. I would show these Frenchmen that an artist had come among them.

I had brought with me from Italy a quantity of drawings and sketches and several small models in wood. These I laid out before me. As I owned only ten pounds of silver, scarcely two pounds of gold, and not more than six stones of any fineness, I was required to choose a design that did not fall beyond my poverty. With free range, my choice would have been a silver

chalice with a figure of Apollo on the top, and a scroll of oak leaves around the side. However, it would have taken not less than thirty pounds of silver, which was so far beyond my means that I unwillingly gave up thought of it. Then I be-thought me of a great salt-cellar for the King's table. It would have been of rare beauty, for I had spent much time upon the drawings, and its making would have gained me great honor. Yet in my haste in leaving Italy I had neglected to bring a certain fine hammer and, although I had inquired, it was not to be found in Paris. So I gave up thoughts of the salt-cellar.

Having cast about among my drawings, I finally settled upon a reliquary. It would be three thumbs in length and my two pounds of gold would answer for it. I had a composition for the cover which would set off my ruby to advantage.

Having made this choice, I laid out a flat piece of gold of a size that would do for the lower part of the box, and took the hammers that were suited. Then I put on my apron and went to work. Within half an hour my hammer was making as merry a tune as ever gladdened a goldsmith.

And yet, strangely enough, my mind was absent from my task. It was on Mademoiselle. My window being open, I had heard a lout go by, humming a song, "*Vrai Dieu d'Amour*," which was then sung all about the streets of Paris. I caught the lilt from him and I tapped my hammers to it. But of my task I thought not, nor of Oliver, nor the King, nor of politics.

If, indeed, I had been asked about French politics, in my few days' stay in Paris, I could have told no more than that there was a stoop-shouldered king on the gilt throne of France, by the name of Louis the Eleventh, and that somewhere in Burgundy, in revolt, was a Duke Charles, the son of Philip the Good, who sent nightmares across the kingly dreams. Duke Charles was greatly feared by the people of Paris, and tremulous were their nightcaps pillowed all about the city. I have heard servant-women telling children that they must cease their cries or Charles the Rash would get them, as though he were a bear from the mountains.

If it interest you to know more of politics, there went a tale about, that since last winter, when the Dauphin had been born, Louis's brother, the Duke of Guienne, who till then had pranked

himself as next succeeding to the crown of France, had grown monstrous peevish. That *Te Deum*, with all its joyful bells a-ringing, had been a doleful sound to him. And now gossip had it that Louis must look sharp, or else this brother would fall off and join issue with the dreadful Charles. This thought sent a shudder to the narrowest alleyways, as all remembered the slim months of siege, when Paris walls had been invested roundabout, and all the hunger of that time. Other gossip, too, there was, playing with reputations its untiring game of racquets, howbeit my pen is not nibbed for such sportive stuff. Among this gossip there was a rumor that Oliver de Bourges had paid his addresses to the Lady Diane Motier and had been rejected.

To write of bigger matters: England lay to the north, fretting with her York and Lancastrian wars. Edward now, Henry now, for King—turn and turn about—as battles shifted. Edward was married to the sister of Burgundy. Henry's wife was a kinswoman of King Louis. But it was a snivelling England, from whose coat-of-arms there had recently been snatched the fleurs-de-lis pinned there by Henry in the days of Agincourt—an England that was impatient, there-

fore, to roam again the French fields, to gather once more the French posies. A pretty taste had England for a boutonniere of lilies.

Italy? Who need write what all are sure to know? Paul II was Pope, but declining to his death. Rovere and the Orsini scowled at one another when they met, and bit their thumbs. Naples was, as ever, turbulent. There a man's life, at most, was valued as the breath of a lame horse. But Lorenzo empurpled Florence.

But what were such things to me? My ovens and my hammers absorbed my attention. Perhaps I would have given more thought to French politics had I known how soon and how deeply I would be enmeshed in its intrigue. Of Paris that lay beyond the Rue de la Petite Maison I knew nothing, except that it was bright by day and black by night. And yet I was on the threshold of things to come.

At midday a king's servant—from the King, mark you, that same Louis the Eleventh, whose back was as crooked as his purpose—came to my door and drew from his cloak a lead figure of a saint. I looked at it scornfully, for I thought it was the fellow's own, a trifle for a lackey's prayers and kitchen piety. What was my surprise, when

he explained that it belonged to his master! This gave it importance, and I regarded it with closer attention.

"See," he said, "it is twisted. His Majesty wishes you to repair it and to return it to him yourself in his cabinet this night."

When he had gone, I took the image in both my hands, and then and there I straightened it. One twist and it was done. Thereat I ran to the door, and I bawled up the street. The lackey had been too quick. Already he had skipped from sight, and my shouts served but to draw upon me frowns from my neighbors across the way—which, rest you, I answered fittingly. So I came back, and thrust the figure down upon my bench, and put my cunning on my nicer work. All day I went hammering on. If I cast a thought upon the leaden saint, face downward in the litter, it was with wonder that so paltry a mannikin had been given to my care.

And yet I was somewhat glad. It gave me occasion of paying my respects to the King, and something might lie beneath. It's well to heed the slightest breath of potentates.

So, as the day advanced, I fell more to thinking on the King and what my summons boded. Per-

haps, beneath so sour a rind, the melon might be sweet.

I ate an early supper, and at nineteen of the clock, while there was yet an hour of dusk till candle-time, I set out with Michel upon my summons. By God's mercy, my new clothes had come home before twilight, and Sarto was a pretty sight. I wore my plum doublet with black scarf and hose, and a yellow feather in my hat.

It is brief time that King Louis spends in Paris, as Plessis-lez-Tours in the country of the Loire is his favorite seat. When he does honor Paris, his palace is the Hôtel des Tournelles. It was toward this we went.

Michel kept in front and made question of the way. He has little French, but he speaks it loud and waves his arms like Dutch windmills. If at first he gets no proper answer, he bawls his message down his victim's ear. Those he questions, though perhaps they get no notion what he wants, yet give him an answer quick, lest they be struck in the gust. It is best to start him off, they think, although wrong. Therefore it was roundabout we went. It was early, so I cared little.

The streets were mostly narrow and winding. In the doorways men sprawled after supper,

breathing the evening air. Some jiggled children on their knees. Here and again, a woman, sweating with the kitchen, gave a finger to a child that clung about her skirt. A youth went by, smoothing his upper lip, with thoughts upon a wench.

There was no sound of music. In Rome, on such a night, there would have been a strum and tinkle up from every street. Sarto's voice is rough and his fingers are not apt upon the frets, but on such a night in Italy there would have a love-tune upon his lips, did he sing it to a fish-wife. In Paris the ballad-mongers must be sure to starve, for the people are most unmusical and disjoint of tune.

We had walked for half an hour and the streets were almost dark. We had got beyond the place where men lay out, and had come into a tangled nest of streets, the river lying close upon our right. Here was a touch of Naples, for a drunkard slept in a gutter, and once there were cries from a basement entry. In such circumstance, Sarto turns the corners wide and keeps his fingers on his hilt. Michel's prattle fell off. He was content, now, to keep behind my cloak.

Soon we came upon an open square and were before the Palace of the Towers. At the gate

were Scotch guards in kilts. I poked Michel in his ribs to keep him from laughing outright. Then we went within. We traversed a passage, while three Scotsmen whined my name to those in front. Michel was now told to wait and I was sent forward into a vestibule of the King's apartment. By the light from a single taper, I could see that the furnishings were crude, befitting a merchant's dwelling.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed, a good half hour, then a door was opened and I was told to enter. It was a Gothic room into which I came. The lights were shaded with hangings, so that its remoter parts lay in obscurity. In the draught from the door these hangings swayed, and their shadows played at cat and mouse. On the walls were tapestries depicting the Crusades. Beyond was an altar with its figures and vessels, which were of a rough workmanship that made my fingers itch. I stood for a moment, thinking I was its only occupant, and my eyes traveled to the details of the room's carved panels, when I was startled by a sharp-pitched voice from the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPIDER

IF you never met a king, you will to-night. But I'll not dress him up in jewels and velvet. It's the king of fustian that I give you. If he washed his ears, he would be a sweeter trencher comrade.

"Luca Sarto," the voice said. I squinted into the darkness, and I saw an old man in an arm-chair, leaning forward with his chin on his hand. I dropped at once to my knee. "Your Majesty," I said.

In my life I have come face to face twice with King Louis the Eleventh. Twice I have measured my wit against his, and this first encounter was to help me face the dangers of the second.

During several minutes I awaited his speech. He was heavily set in a Spanish chair, and it was the only handsome thing about, except the tracings of the vaulted roof. The chair-back was covered with elfs, or angels maybe, though they had no harps. Their mouths were open as in a choir.

It was woolen knitted stuff that Louis wore, black cloth and frayed fur on the edge. On his feet were pointed slippers, with flaps curled back ragged. He wore a cap pulled tight upon his ears. His scraggy hair escaped. On the vizor of this greasy cap was a row of lead saints, like politicians awaiting audience on the porches of the Vatican—and yet one was gone.

There was an angel on the chair-back that did not sing, but grinned on Louis. Godamercy, there was fair excuse. It gives me trust that there is humor up in heaven. If there are laughter and merry tunes above, I may take the church's hood myself.

The lead figures on his cap recalled my errand, and I took my saint from its wrappings. The King held it before him, and his lips mumbled a prayer. Some mumbling, too, I did myself, thinking it of advantage to my soul that my prayers should ascend in a king's company. Here, at least, God lends a generous ear.

These images made me curious, and it puzzled me why the King carried them so. I learned later that his fits of cruelty are often followed by a kind of fear, at which times he kneels before his saints in ecstasy.

When the King's muttered words had ceased, I looked up, squarely in his eyes, for he was regarding me closely. The King's eyes see everything, like a weazel's in a hole. His scrutiny was but momentary, unless he had been at it during his prayer, for presently he smiled almost good naturedly.

"This is mean work, Sarto, that you have done for me. It stains an artist's fingers."

My answer came quick: "Not when it is done for the King of France."

He smiled at this, and sucked his teeth for a shred of food. "That is a courtier's answer," he said. "I looked for something more honest."

I raised my eyes inquiringly.

"I would have been better pleased had you told me that lead is vile stuff. Your honesty would have showed in that." He squinted shrewdly.

"I'm told, Sarto, that you are a clever artist, the cleverest in Rome. You make pretty little salt-cellars and finger rings for ladies." He laughed sarcastically. "Do I look, think you, like a patron of the arts?"

"By Saint Sepulchre," I thought, "no!" and flushed with anger. And yet I said: "You

look, sire, more likely to favor a friend of Cardinal Rovere, than one solely an artist."

The King was pleased at this and laughed. "Then you are not surprised to be called here to-night."

"No, your Majesty."

The King now tapped an impatient cane until I had found a stool. First he paid me compliment that I was countryman to the man he called his master, Francesco Sforza. "The wisest of all rulers," he said. And one of his precepts was this: 'Strike no retainer until necessity push hard, then strike with steel, so that he will not rise again.' " Louis smiled, for he was now far beyond such a primer lesson. In this contrivance Louis was himself a tome of strange matter, but with a print that was hard to read.

Of the present Pope, Paul II, he spoke. He was a friend of France, free of alliance with England and Burgundy. But he had been ill. "Has he fully recovered?" asked the King. "No?" "Blessed saints!" he cried. "Why should friends I've need of fall into a rheum, when so many else might be snuffed out without a loss?"

Then he spoke of my friend, Cardinal Rovere, of whose ambition he had heard the babble.

How would he regard Guienne's marrying Marie of Burgundy—the Princess who had been hawked for highest bidding before all the princes of the Continent—to which marriage Louis was opposed, for reasons of succession? Burgundy and Guienne conjoined would have disrupted France. How strong was Rovere in the papal college? How greatly would he value French influence toward his election? French gold would crook the stiff knees of opposition. On this tune he played long. It was roundabout with repetition until I fretted.

And then he thought to set a buzz of ambition in my brain, that so he might enlist my services 'twixt Tournelles and Vatican. "A cardinal's hat is not beyond hope," he said.

Thus did the King ply me with questions, and I talked to the limit of prudence. But his flattery did not intoxicate me. Mine is not a tongue that is greased for indiscretion. There is not so much blab in Sarto as might fill even a quarter pot. A man's best use of tongue is at his meals, and then partnered with his teeth. Let both of them sit idle when the rump's gone off. It's wench's business then and empty gossipry.

Concluding with me, King Louis gave me

thanks, profusely, as though I had told great matter. And then to clap the whole, he gave me a finger ring. Of this, hereafter. But what sweetened things he said, is my own concernment.

Then I arose but, as by an afterthought, he held me. "Ah, I had forgot," he said. "The Lady Diane tells me that you sheltered her last night." He paused and put therein a smile, as it were a sweetmeat for my pains. "She and Madame Corday must have found the roads outside very heavy. Did they speak of the success of their excursion? Let me see, where was it they went—Rouen? If so, they would have entered Paris by the *Porte Saint Honoré*, which is near your shop. Boulogne—did they mention such a city? Did they consort there with our English friends?"

Now I did know that *Mademoiselle* had entered Paris by the *Porte Saint Honoré*. And yet I stayed my tongue. On the instant there came to me the thought of how the king's archer had pitched forward on his face. "God's blood," I thought. "Michel was right. He came to spy on *Mademoiselle*."

Now, *Mademoiselle* was naught to me, or

nearly naught—for I do confess that her beauty had stirred me. And yet she had been my guest. If she held a secret from the King, I could be false-mouthed on what I knew. For if there is a fit occasion Sarto can lie like a village signpost.

There was a chicken once, also, who lied to a fox; yet the fox, I'm told, had cold fowl for supper.

"Of a truth, sire," I said, "Mademoiselle appeared to have entered by the *Porte Saint Honoré*. Yet she really journeyed from the east of Paris, for once she mentioned broken roads beyond Vincennes. She said it to Madame Corday and then she hushed her talk with a sidling glance at me, whether I had caught the word. But I know not why she came so roundabout."

"So, so," answered the King, and he pulled his nose between his fingers. "Then she made no mention whatever of *Boulogne*?"

"No, sire."

The King sat without speech, his head bent forward but wagging slightly, busy with some problem. Presently he looked up and squinted on me closely. "Sarto," he smirked, "you had best think again. It sorts not with what I already

know. Not that it matters, Monsieur, except as a test of your honesty."

"As God's above, sire." I protested, and rose upon my feet.

King Louis eyed me narrowly and still wagged his head. "I seem to have heard," he said, "that she came from Boulogne. Have a care, Master Artist! It would be an ill start toward your prosperity, if you minced the truth. She brought an English message from the Channel. White or red? Did she talk of colors?"

The King moved forward in the light and ceased rubbing on his nose. At this I saw his face. To my surprise it was sharp with eagerness. "Boulogne," he muttered and kept biting on his lips.

His manner gave me pause. I was following a darkened course. Wit alone would not keep me from the gutter.

The King was about to continue speech when, with a quick motion, he put his hand to his head, as though in pain. He had done this several times before, but now I saw that his face was white and contorted.

He grasped the sides of the chair feebly as though to gain his feet and settled back. His

excitement had given place to weariness. "Go on," he said. "Tell me about the Lady Diane!" Then at my indecision, he turned almost fiercely. "Why do you stare at me? It's nothing. Only a little dizziness—the fish at dinner. Mary, blessed mother," he moaned.

He seized my arm and shook it.

"Heart of me, your Majesty," I cried out, "your illness frightens me, for my father was once ill as you are. I'll call Olivier le Daim."

The King tightened his hold of my arm. He kicked the cushions from under his feet, and stood up, hanging his weight on me.

"I have overeaten," he said. "It must have been the fish—and yet your father was sick in this way. When was it?"

"Last winter, three days after Christmas."

"But your father?" the King whined; "has he recovered?"

I did not reply.

"But he recovered?" the King persisted. He dug his nails into my arm. Presently he released his hold. Then hoarsely, "When did he die?"

"It was the seventh day after Christmas," I said. My eyes were on Louis, for a strange confusion was coming on him.

For a moment there was naught. Then he pitched from me, arms wide apart and shaking to the fingers, his lips twitching like a palsy. His legs, mark you, were bowed, or else his knees had clapped. It was fearful to see them wagging in their divorcement. At the room's end he jerked down the hanging that blurred the light. Likely enough it was a child's fear of the dark. When the light came clear, it showed his shrunken figure, an old man with the horror of death riding hard on him. He were Turk or Saracen who had not pitied him.

Forgetful of me, he drew his cap from his head and placed it on the Spanish chair. He went down on his creaking knees with his wrinkled hands clenched before him, until his finger tips were patched with red and white. His lips were mumbling prayers. But he mumbled so low that if the saints heard him, they must have hushed the noises of heaven and cocked their ears close on Paris. But so wrapped was Louis, that Sarto had gone from his notice as far off as the last of the Canaries.

It was thus that I left him. In all the dark city of Paris, who shall say that there was another so miserable? Hardly was there an alleyway in

which, at some time that night, there were not croaks of laughter and lean mirth; but within the stone room of the palace, beneath its towers and gargoyles, did the King whimper his fears.

Thus I learned the weakness of Louis, his superstition and fear of death. It was by this knowledge that I kept my bones from resting until the crack of doom in his loathsome dungeons of Loches. But a woman's wit served also.

And yet I had not learned all the spider's ways. Father Paul, in his watchful years, had observed many things he did not impart to me. It were asking too much that in so short a schooling a hungry man, tantalized by kitchen smells, should gain acquaintance with all the wiles of the spider. What I learned, served me. It saved my life, wherewith my genius has been preserved. Yet had I known all the webs a-weaving as I left the King, in fright I had slammed the door on France.

In truth, at the time, I was not scared enough. If a wooden angel on a chair-back can grin, Sarto is not one to shiver. He'll show himself at least as valorous as a female angel. Yet Sarto and the angel were far too lightsome. The sequel of these events held storm. Will you read on a bit?

CHAPTER IX

LADIES

WHEN I came out of the cabinet, my first care was for the King. Even when I was well down the passage, I could hear him still mumbling on his prayer. If a man has such need of God, I thought, he must be suffering from a painful rheum. It's a zeal for prayer which marks a vile contagion.

In the anteroom I roused a guardsman. "If there is a leech in the place," I cried, "send him to the King." Then I went out, leaving a stir behind me.

In the outer room I had thought to have found Michel, my servant. But it seems that when he did not find any one to chatter Italian with him, he had slid off his stool and had gone outside. I saw him in the street a hundred paces off, talking with a man. Aside from these two there was no one in sight except a beggar woman who whined with outstretched hand. "Monsieur, for the love of God." I gave her a coin and called Michel.

He came up, leaving his companion. He was profuse with apology for having left his post. But he had chanced upon an Italian fresh from Rome, he said; a fellow who had been a boatman on the banks. As both of them knew but a pennyworth of French, they had been stifled with dumbness for a week. And so, on finding each other, their tongues had wagged. I asked Michel who he was.

"I know not," Michel replied, "except that he is monstrous friendly, and that his name is Maistro. And when he learned, Master, that it was Messer Luca Sarto whom I served, he fairly tossed his cap for joy. He was so homesick, he said, and your name stirred his thoughts toward Italy. And, Master, when I told him where we lived, he offered to take me out and show me the sights of Paris."

"But you don't know whom he serves?"

"What does it matter, if he has money in his poke?"

It was a shrewd answer of the varlet.

Now I was somewhat turned about in coming out of the palace, and for a moment I stood wondering which was the shortest way home. The

only mark to guide me were the towers of Notre Dame, and for an instant I could have sworn that they had gone off, arm in arm from their former place. I set myself straight at last. "The river's here," I said. "My way lies there."

I had hardly started when the beggar woman to whom I had given the coin plucked my sleeve. "For love of God, Monsieur," she whined. She raised her mouth toward my ear. "Luca Sarto," she whispered.

Now I'll confess that in Italy even the beggars know me, but it surprised me that in Paris it should be so. Consequently I took her by the shoulders and turned her to the light. I had never seen her face before. "How is it, my beauty," I asked, "that you know me?"

But still she beckoned to me. She stood within the shadow, thirty paces from the palace door. Presently she whispered, "I speak to Luca Sarto?" and then, "The Lady Diane wishes to see you. Follow me and I'll lead you to her." She ended with her former whining tone, to cloak her commerce with me. "For the love of God," she said, and stretched out her hand in the posture of a beggar.

At this, without even so much as looking back, she set off through the shadows. I waved to Michel to come, and followed after.

Michel came up at a trot. "It was last night," he said, "that I told you we would hear of *Made-moiselle* again." Then he followed at my heels.

We came shortly to a narrow street with balconied houses and steep roofs. Twice we ducked under chains, which are strung from house to house, as they are in Italy, against the chance of broils. At a few only of the houses candles burned in the front windows, for the edict requiring lights was neglected, so high was the cost of candles. Our course was mostly north and west, for the towers of *Notre Dame* now came behind us.

Then we came to a house better than most, if one might judge by the carvings on the door. It was as high as a tower, with slanting roof. Most of these Paris roofs are steep-pitched, with sharpened edge a-top. They are built like the Spanish donkey, but larger, as if for the torture of a giant. It is a pretty penance for an unbeliever to set him with weighted feet to jog upon the knife-back donkey. They say it brings a sinner back to Christ.

But here was the old woman knocking on the

door. It was opened by a man-servant. I told Michel to squat upon the sill and wait for my return. At the top of a second flight of stairs the servant threw open a door.

It was a large room with a brisk fire upon the hearth. Beside it sat Madame Corday and Mademoiselle.

I am an Italian, thank God. The sun has shone where I have lived, and the blood is warm. Sarto knows when a woman's pretty.

Mademoiselle was working on a frame on which embroidery was stretched. She was clad in soft blue stuff that matched her eyes. Her gown was cut to a V in front, but an undermuslin spared her modesty. Her hair was held in a gold band and mesh. Her stockings were white with blue clocks upon them. We'll see these stockings again, in other circumstance. I beg you to remember these blue clocks.

Mademoiselle put down her needle as I came forward and held out her hand to me. "It is good of Monsieur to come," she said.

"Mademoiselle is gracious to allow it."

The Lady Diane smiled at my eagerness, then her look grew grave again. It appeared that she was fretted over something.

"Perhaps Monsieur remembers that when Madame and I parted from him last night he made us an offer of help whenever we stood in need."

"It is so, dear lady. I have dreamed of it all day long."

"But we did not know how soon the time would come. Perhaps Monsieur's offer was a jest."

"It would be an ill jest if you did not think me serious, Mademoiselle."

"A need arose to-night." She hesitated. "Luca Sarto, you may withdraw your offer, and we shall think naught the worse of you."

"Mademoiselle, I renew my offer. If there is any service, I hold myself ready for it."

"Then, Monsieur, I'll be plain and blunt. Five nights ago Madame Corday and I left Boulogne with a message of some consequence and of a secret nature. You will forgive me if I withhold a too precise knowledge of it. We returned in haste and with what secrecy we might. Our visit to you was unintentional. But despite our secrecy it comes to our ears to-night that the one person from whom we were chiefly concerned to

keep our movements hidden has come to a partial knowledge of them."

Mademoiselle looked searchingly at me, as though to learn whether I divined the one she meant.

"By my soul, dear lady," I replied, "I know the story. Let me finish it. I know not the message you brought from Boulogne, but I can hazard a guess how your coming was betrayed. It was the archer who tumbled in the door. If I smell the business right, the King of France is the person you wished to keep in darkness."

Mademoiselle nodded. "Sarto makes a close guess."

"And this very night, dear lady, I've been playing at words with this same king. Have no fear of it! He got naught from me."

Thereupon I told her the events of the morning, how the servant of Louis came with the leaden image, and how I had gone upon his summons. I concluded with the strange fit that had come on Louis. During this narration Mademoiselle watched me narrowly. She must have seen how honestly I dealt with her. When I told of the lies I had given Louis as to their direction into

Paris, she smiled doubtfully. "And did Louis believe you?" she asked.

"I fear not," I answered.

"He knew our course, Monsieur, but, thank God, he does not guess our message." She sat for a moment in deep thought.

"Monsieur," she said at length, "this message that we bore to Paris we must send on to others. But here's the trouble. We would be detected in leaving Paris. And our servants, too, are known. Meantime there is a man in the village of Melun, but a day's journey out of Paris, waiting for our word."

"And Sarto, then, is to be the messenger?"

"If he will."

"God knows, dear lady, I'd rather draw my sword. But I'm but a beggar for your friendship, and I'll take what's offered."

"Of danger there is probably nothing," Mademoiselle replied. "Yet the times are bad. You had best take your servant, and go armed."

She now took from her garment a letter and handed it to me. I read the superscription. "Jacques Bonnet," it went. I looked up quickly. "Perhaps Sarto is mistaken as to the nature of his

errand. It would fit Sarto's humor sourly to play postboy to some gallant."

But Mademoiselle laughed. "You may be content. There is more of broil in the message than love."

I read on: "'The Inn of the Good Laborer, Melun.' How shall I know this man?"

"In this fashion," she said. "You will reach the inn by dusk. With your dinner order a wine called *vin de la rose blanche*. They will not have it in the cellar, for a wine of such a name does not exist. Yet you will protest that any other wine will not serve your thirst, and you will bid them look again. It will be your loud demand and the outcry of it about the house, that will proclaim you to Monsieur Bonnet."

"In faith," I interposed, "I'll bawl out loud enough."

"Finally," Mademoiselle continued, "Monsieur Bonnet will ask you to share a yellow wine he has. But do not give him the letter until you are alone together. Let me impress another point. It's likely enough that no danger will threaten you. However, Louis may now distrust you. To make it safe that the letter does not reach his hands, at the first sign of danger read it and destroy it ut-

terly. If then you meet Jacques Bonnet, tell him this at least: that it is a white rose that blossoms in the English garden."

"Mademoiselle. I've written it on my memory."

"And when will you start?"

"I'll be out of Paris to-morrow morning before the city stirs."

"We are deeply in your debt, Monsieur."

"And shall I see you when you return?" I asked shrewdly. "It will be fitting to report my success."

"Later, Monsieur. But on the day after to-morrow all of King Louis's Court journeys to Loches, and we attend. You have spoken of his strange sickness. Louis goes on pilgrimage to pray for remedy to the Madonna of Saint Ours which stands in the church at Loches. Once in many years, they say, the statue comes to life, and then her touch is healing. It's healing he wants, as his trouble grows upon him. Not a nod of life has he had yet, but he is to try his prayers again."

She paused. "What is the color of the rose, Monsieur?"

"It's white, dear lady," I replied.

"And you start to-morrow."

"In the dawn, Mademoiselle."

Diane searched me with her eyes. "Monsieur," she said at last, "I have need of friends."

I bent and kissed her fingers. To my contentment she wore no betrothal ring.

"When you have returned," I said, "I'll come to claim your friendship."

Diane smiled. "I give it to you now," she said.

"Blessed lady," I cried out, "I want no Madonna for my prayers. It's you alone can heal me."

But Diane checked me. "Peace," she said; "it's sacrilege."

I turned toward her at the door. She had taken a white rose from the table and she tossed it to me. "It's a token for your luck," she said.

Then she wished me Godspeed, and I left her, my wit offering me no pretext to prolong my stay. Had I found my tongue, methinks she would have honored my pretext, for in her eyes there was a kindly look that tagged me to the door.

You have learned from this that Sarto gives a quick decision. There are men who put delay upon their words. They may or they may not.

“Await the hour!” they say. “It’s as the day advises.” If it is but a trivial meeting, these men leave a starting-hole. They may be engaged, they say. They must first look upon their tablets. Sarto says his yes or no at once, flat, even for a journey beyond the Pillars.

I had come to Diane a goldsmith. I departed less the artist and more the soldier, with a tingle of adventure in my blood and bravado in my brain. And in my heart? ’Fore God, I’m not one of your sick-green youth who worships the first woman who smiles. Women had crossed my path before, and had held out to me their white fingers, and made eyes through their fans, and still I was single. It is enough that the Lady Diane interested me. Let the gossips go no further! Methinks, however—and I do profess it to God—that Diane had most marvelous blue eyes, and that her hand lay in mine at parting as if it were in no hurry to be gone. Heigho for love, tra-la, la-la-la. It’s a sweet tune when the wind is from the south in May, but Sarto is not ready yet to give himself to any woman.

I puzzled, I confess, why Mademoiselle had pitched on me to do her errand. “There’s some-

thing in you, Sarto," I thought, "something that fetches the ladies to you." I stroked my beard and hummed the tune *L'Amour de Moi*.

And yet from my work I was being plucked. Melun was to be but the start of my travels. I was venturing like a Portuguese sailor into southern seas, when it was only the northern stars I knew. What an Afric coast, had I known it, I had set my journey on!

So I jiggled the letter in my palm and went my way. Michel slept on the doorstep, but I pried him loose with my boot and put him on his feet. He must have been dreaming of the archer, for he was mumbling how the fellow had fallen on his face. "It was a snare, Master. He came to spy." And then he awoke and rubbed his eyes.

A wet scum was on the city. Down by the Seine there must have been a carouse, for a drunken sound came up. At the crossing of the Rue Saint Roch, a comely trollop offered me her company, but I waved her off. At last I came home and threw my clothing right and left.

"Michel," I said, "you'll call me at the dawn."

Michel cocked his head in surprise.

"We have an errand at Melun."

“For Mademoiselle?” he asked, and grinned.

I swore upon him for his insolence. Then I fell to bed.

The next morning we were up when it was hardly light. Before Paris was astir we started on horseback on the road to Melun.

CHAPTER X

CABBAGE IN THE DISH

IF it were my desire to mystify, I would hold secret a circumstance that I myself did not know until long afterwards. It seems best, however, to make but a bald narration, and not to follow the devices of the story writers, who withhold the truth to tease the expectation.

The servant woman, Jeanne—she who had played the beggar and had been my guide—had gone noisily down the passage and had slammed the door at its further end. It was but a pretense, for presently she tiptoed back and stood at Made-moiselle's door again. It was thus she heard our converse. Her sharp nose scratched the key-hole.

Sarto has no relish for a hag's company and if he wrote for his own pleasure he would bid Jeanne go packing and be rid of her. She is cabbage in the dish which must be eaten first, but there are sweets in the pantry. You must learn first from her how Oliver knew of Sarto's departure.

Jeanne narrowly avoided Michel who dozed upon the step. She made sure that he was asleep—his snoring was warrant—then she climbed across his legs and went off in the darkness.

A man, meanwhile, sat alone near by and threw dice on a bare table. His name was Gaston, if it matter. To him she went.

"Sixes and sixes again!" he cried. "All the saints in the devil's hatband love me." He rattled the dice before his ears. "Dance, you little dears, dance! Sixes again. It's a shame there's no money on the throw. Come in, Jeanne!"

She had hurried and first she had to catch her breath. "Mademoiselle sent me for Luca Sarto. So I took him to her room," she said.

The man sprawled out his legs and gave her close attention.

"I couldn't hear much, for I'm a deaf old woman." She looked at him shrewdly and shook her poke.

"Here!" He threw her a coin, which she clutched—for the tentacles of the French palm are like a crab's. "Now you can hear better," he said.

"He is going to Melun with a letter to some one," Jeanne replied.

"What name?" This with a more than forward squint of interest.

She paused again as though considering what her information might be worth. Surely when a man goes into such a stew, the price of the knowledge must be high. "I am betraying my mistress, whom I love," she whined. "Is it not worth gold?"

He flung her another coin.

And so he got it from her beggar lips. "Jacques Bonnet," and for address, "Le Bon Laboureur, Melun." And that was all he got for his payment, for she was careful that the commodity of her sale did not overslop its measure.

But it seemed to be enough. He left the room, slamming the door behind him.

It was to Oliver de Bourges that Gaston went. Oliver was gaily dressed in colors, as for a feast of peacock. He had pared his nails and was mixing a pomade with his thumb.

Gaston cried out abruptly. "There's news, Oliver!" And he repeated what he knew.

But it brought no gladness to Oliver. "Hell fire," he snarled—that handsome Oliver, who loved me so much that he wished me quit of the troubles of this world. "What does the fool

Jacques do in Melun?" Whereat he spoke oaths that would have scorched a sailor's tongue. "Jacques recks not of danger. If he lurks so close to Paris, the King will spy him out. He'll be taken, and then,"—he looked darkly at Gaston—"God, I can feel already Tristan's fingers on my throat."

Here Gaston broke in. "Peace, Oliver," he said. "You wear yourself."

But Oliver's prattle broke loose again: "I'll dream of cord and ax to-night. And you, man, sit as cool as a waiting-woman. We stand on a tickle-edge. In sixty-five all of us went against the King. Then, after the confusion that followed the battle of Montl'héry, all of us licked the King's boot. But Burgundy put less spittle in the business, and with him was Jacques. Of a consequence, while you and I have again come to Louis's favor—in which we hope to remain until it pleases us otherwise—Jacques consorts openly with Burgundy, and snaps his fingers at the King. And now Jacques comes to Melun, so close to Paris. And does this with so little secrecy that a serving-woman can find it out. Suppose that Jacques is captured. He is put upon the rack. What then, think you? Will he spare

us? His love for me is not that kind. 'Put Oliver alongside,' he'll say. 'Give me that comfort!' "

Once more Gaston broke in: "Peace, Oliver," he said. "You foam like a pint pot. You are more froth than brew."

Oliver brayed again: "Perhaps you have forgotten the Common Weal. It's sure that Jacques, to spite us for deserting him, will stir the King's memory of it. Louis would be nothing loath to catch me up. My credit stands on slippery soil. Why else would the King thrust me from the Palais Saint Louis? Then there is our pact with England. It gets deeper as I think upon it."

"Monsieur, hold yourself! Breathe awhile!"

But Oliver kept on: "Edward of England, the on-and-off King, who itches to feel again the crown upon his head, and borrows money from Burgundy for this purpose, he is no friend of Louis. What think you if our commerce with him came out? The rot goes down deep within the apple. This commerce will be known if they get this Jacques and put him on the rack."

He paused for breath, then belched forth again: "And now Jacques must come so close to

Paris, and you and I must live in sweat until he comes safely off."

Gaston waited until Oliver had spent himself, scratching some stains upon his doublet with his thumbnail. From plate to mouth, it seemed, his freighted knife had often gone shipwreck on his front. Then at last he spoke: "Oliver," he said, "there's too much gas in you. You fizz at the cork. Hold a bit! There is good comes out of this. Here I have brought you word that Sarto and his servant are going from Paris, to be gone all night. For a week you have been fretting lest Sarto find your papers in the flooring. The time fits now to bring them off. It's easy to break into an empty building."

"So, so?" Oliver replied. "And are there no other servants in the house?"

"Not one. Though it's likely that when Sarto returns to Paris, he will take a journeyman or two."

"You speak shrewdly, Gaston. To-morrow night's the very time. I'll make the trial."

Gaston came away.

We've eaten the cabbage. Quick! Let's change the dishes!

While these things were chancing, Sarto polished his estoc and tried its temper, unmindful that his name was caught in a soldier's profanity as he sat by his cups, was in the prayers of a blue-eyed girl, and in the schemes of a great king, on whose lips was a cruel smile. These schemes must live in darkness. In fitting time I'll put a candle to them.

And so the goldsmith slept, and the kettle of France simmered and brewed a peppery broth.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY

WHEN Giovanni's body was found upon the bank, there was excitement in Rome. Although Jacopo was ready to swear against me, the Orsini could not bring a charge on me in open law, because of the killing of Andrea. By their influence, therefore, they hushed the matter and relied for their revenge on the chance of secret methods. But it was a week before they sent a rogue named Maistro into France to fall on me unaware.

Behind me, therefore, came Maistro, and his was a sweaty journey, also; for day and night he crowded on. Is it not enough that French rogues disturb Sarto's sleep, without an Italian rogue as well? So this man came in darkness, grim upon his business.

Set down my pages now and then, and turn your ear eastward! You'll hear hoofs clacking in the night. Soon or late Sarto will entertain another visitor.

So into Paris this Italian varlet came. Blood

still was on his mood, and, "Hell's fire," he snarled, "where do I find this Sarto?" He went poking into all the pot-houses, if any word might drop that would set him right.

He merits a word of description, scarcely more. Maistro was his name, a lithe fellow, more of cat than dog, a swart face with a slash across one cheek, a sullen eye except when there is a drink or a wench in sight—a fellow daubed together out of very common clay, yet with a mind to trick himself a gentleman. Being now far from Italy and acquaintance to take him down, he wears a sword and dagger, and a feather in his hat.

He haunted the pot-houses and, though he learned naught of me, he got a pretty taste for French drink. And then by merest chance, Maistro fell in with Michel, as I've told you—for this was the same Maistro with whom Michel talked on the night of my audience with King Louis. It was no wonder he tossed his cap with gladness.

Now of Oliver, again; and how he and Maistro came together!

Behind my workshop, the Palais Saint Louis, there is an ancient tennis court, given now to kitchen uses. This is entered from a lane that

leads under an archway from the street. There is a wooden gate across this lane, but a panel has been kicked out, with room for squeezing through if one is not too paunched.

The following night—I being now gone on my way to Melun—when it had gone twenty of the clock, Oliver de Bourges came down the street. He had a servant but he left him at the corner. The Palais Saint Louis was dark. Jeanne was right, and Sarto had gone off. He tried the front door. It was tight as a tomb. Then he went to the gate at the lane. Oliver has been stuffing himself with sweets these thirty years, and his doublet buttons scratched in getting through the panel.

He crossed the court and found a swinging shutter. He clambered through.

He spat upon my ovens. Then he sought his bedroom, and secured his papers. By the faint light at the window he looked hard on the packet to make sure that none were gone. "I dreamed the King got hold of them," he mumbled.

He now returned to the room where my ovens were. He itched to leave the house, yet it would be worth a minute to foul my work. He lighted a taper, and set it in the socket by my bench.

There was a litter on it of sketches, chisels, hammers, and bits of metal. He hacked my chisels. Then he put his thumb through my sketches. The taper blinked and flared with the stir of his dirty work.

At the last he spied a gilded model which I had set to copy for my larger work. He stole it, but not for gain. Rather, it was to thwart me.

Oliver chuckled at his mischief. Then he opened the street door and stepped out. There was a man coming down the street. Oliver leaned back in the shadow to let him pass. When opposite, however, this man stopped. Oliver held himself against the sill while one might say a *Pater Noster*, then becoming curious, he thrust out his head.

"Good sir," he said, "perchance you 'll tell me what halts you?"

"I seek the house of Messer Luca Sarto. Will you direct me to it?" It was vile French he spoke, and Oliver knew him to be an Italian.

It was Maistro, the rogue of the Orsini.

"Well, sir, and what then?" Oliver asked.

"I bring him a message," continued Maistro. "By 'r Lady, I ask in all civility. If you know the house, set me right!"

Oliver thought a bit. He was in a hurry to be gone, lest finding his papers be snarled in other things. He might send the fellow off on wrong direction, or—he paused—it would take little time to play upon him and hear his message. It might concern Sarto's trip to Melun. If so, it would be worth the hearing. If a covered dish is set before you, it 's well at least to lift the cover to see what meats are on it.

Maistro spoke impatiently: "My direction said it was the first house beyond the turn. If so, it must be here."

"You come right," said Oliver. "I 'm Sarto myself."

"Sarto, Sarto? Perhaps I mistook your words. Did you tell me that you are Sarto?"

"None other."

Maistro hesitated. "Methinks you speak not like an Italian. I must be sure it 's Sarto before I speak my message."

Oliver answered him peevishly. "Have n't you seen me come from my house? You may be content that I 'm the man you seek."

Maistro put a sly question. "Name me your servant, Monsieur!"

Oliver replied sarcastically, "Michel 's his

name. Perhaps your message is to him. I'll go seek him about the house."

Maistro seemed to fumble at his purse, which hung beside his dagger. Then on a sudden he cried out. "By God's blood, no! My message is for Sarto."

He drew his dagger. Oliver saw its flash.

"Hold a bit," he cried. "You're mistaken. I'm not Sarto." And he skipped back upon the step and groped for his sword.

But Maistro was not stopped by the outcry. He leaped up the steps. Oliver stood in a corner of the entrance, snarling with fear. "Stay yourself! I'm not Sarto!"

But Maistro cried, "I have your word for that, Monsieur." Like a cat he sprang upon him. In close work a sword is useless. He drove his dagger in Oliver's ribs, then stretched out the body on the steps. "The Orsini send their love to Sarto," he said.

He listened to make sure that no one was disturbed in the house across the way. No head showed at any window. There was silence, except for the dripping of blood from the step.

He dragged the body to the deeper shadow, keeping off lest he smirch himself. There was a

purse with small gold in it, a kerchief, Sarto's gilded model, and the papers for which Oliver had come. He took them all—grinning on the model for he thought it to be gold—wiped his dagger on Oliver's doublet and ran off in the darkness.

It was a full ten minutes later that a head came out of a window across the way. "Murder! Yoho! Here's dirty work!" The outcry roused the street.

Presently there was a crowd about Sarto's door. It pushed in so close that the foremost were dabbled with Oliver's blood.

The man who had done the bawling was in the center, telling what he knew. "The fellow who is dead is Luca Sarto. I heard him proclaim himself."

But another neighbor brought a lantern. He stood over the body, and then scratched his head. "On the soul of Peter, you've misreckoned it. The fellow is not Sarto at all."

"It's likely, then," said a third neighbor, "that the one who said his name was Sarto was the villain who did the murder."

"It's likely enough," the first speaker answered, all blurred in his thoughts.

And so the report went out that Sarto was a

rogue and murderer. When Sarto was not to be found on the morrow, it seemed to make it sure. Before night a king's writ made statement of the matter, and set up a reward for his arrest. Yet Sarto knew not of it, as he was at Melun.

As for Maistro, this only: He sweated until he was quit of Paris and on the road toward Italy. Melun is on this road. We shall meet him again.

CHAPTER XII

I POLISH MY SWORD AND GO A-JOURNEYING

THE morning that followed my meeting with King Louis and Mademoiselle Diane, I set out with Michel, as I've said, for Melun. Our start was early. I prodded Michel and kicked him, for he sleeps like a clod. I had set Mademoiselle's white rose in a cup, but it was wilted. I kissed its petals but dropped it in the sink.

We were off before the cobbled pavement had sounded the first hurry of the day. We took to the country toward the southeast, through the Porte Saint Antoine.

Michel on excursions is overmuch given to chattering. His tongue trots with his horse's legs. I silenced him by my frowns, and I put him to the rear, some sixty paces, that my thoughts might not be broken by his bad Italian.

Company on the road is at best of doubtful value. I am a poet when the wind is south and then I wish silence for my thoughts. Sometimes

I devise a measure and I weave the hills and valleys into verse. Or I set a tune to a lady's eyes and rhyme their color to the blueness of the sky. I fling, perhaps, a sonnet to the moon, or play pitch and toss with stars and planets.

On a journey I speak my fancies as they come. I am not one of your dull rhymesters who scribbles in a garret on thin gruel from a stewpan, and comes out bleared at night. And yet I traveled once with such a silly fellow. And I humored him—this blotter of ink, this spoiler of parchment. He foamed in my ear, but I held my lips shut lest I vent a sarcasm, and in mercy I wagged agreement to his nonsense and let him puff himself like a crier.

No company is best. You have learned my most exquisite modesty. Yet when I go alone upon a journey there comes on me a most pleasing conceit. If any one is near I cannot blow the bubble big. I am therefore robbed, for it is the greatest joy on earth when meditation blows these fancies on its pipe. Alone, I am another Giotto, no greater, for even then some shreds of modesty hang about me. But can I tell my genius and ambition to a companion? His answer, wandering in the fields, might be of manure and pigs. Or he

might keep tally on my extravagance, and betray me later in company. I hold that man a traitor who tells to the people of the plains the things that are wrung in confidence on the soul's high slopes.

And so by preference I travel alone, granted, of course, that there is no danger of brigandage or encounter.

One's early mood will not hold all day. On the morning ride only will be the exaltation, the full pots of color ready for the brush. Such frisking of the mind ceases by noon. This is to be expected. One may not eat his nuts with the violence with which he attacked his entrée. Nor does a tub fill with as great a splatter when the water has risen nearly to the brim. As the day falls into a placid evening, so the spirits; until at last you descend from your upland—the mountains of your lofty thought—to some shadowed, low-set village, hard by running water. It is in twilight mood you complete your journey.

You throw back your head and bawl, and an hostler comes to take your horse. Then you slap the dust off your legs and sniff with your nostrils for the kitchen. Alongside it, on the cobbles, tubs are set. You roll up your sleeves and plunge your arms in, and splash your face and neck,

while wenches look and giggle from the kitchen doorway.

So much is talk. This is what I did. We came to Melun well toward the end of the afternoon. As appeared from the stir as we entered the town, it was a day of fair. For a half-hour previously along the road, there had streamed off past us the country people that had had their entertainment. They were older folk mostly and very young children, who slept on the jouncing horses. On coming to the inn I found that the crowd centered on the square before it. A group of men and wenches were dancing a baladine upon the grass. And there were booths set up for the sale of gauds and relics, together with sure nostrums against the return of the plague.

I washed and beautified myself, and then, as it still lagged an hour of supper, I dragged out a stool, for I wished to see the manner of enjoyment of these French villagers. They were country folk—men from the fields. Of the women there were more wives than daughters—red-faced, bouncing creatures that grudged not their ankles to the crowd.

Now I had come pounding all day upon my horse, and I was so comfortable on my stool that

it would take a handsome jade to get me to my feet. Jeanne la Pucelle herself, although she beguiled a king, must have given me more than a witch's wink to set me frisking to the pipes. But presently I observed a comely country wench. She had a fine, slim figure, bare, white shoulders and a roving eye. Her foot was tapping to the music. "Sarto," I thought, "there's no need to sulk. Give a pleasure when you can!"

In a moment I caught her eye. "My dear," I said, "the tune has started." I seized her about the middle and romped with her across the grass. We whirled around three times, brushing off several fat, slow dancers, who were jouncing up and down like butter to market. The wench's hair was blown across her shoulders, and she laughed outright with pleasure. Invitation for more glinted in her eyes, or I'm a Jew, but I left her when the tune was done. Nor did I consent to dance again.

Presently a church bell marked the sunset. It was the Angelus to close the day. *Laudo Deum verum*—, said the bell, *plebem voco—congrego clerum—defunctos ploro—pestum fugo—festa decoro*. It is thus the church circles and protects us.

Where a church bell rings I have observed the air is sweet. Dew glistens on flower and stalk. Soft showers follow on a drought. Fruits ripen unblemished in the sun. No hawk disturbs the barnyard. Dogs are not fretted by a windy moon. Nor does witch or lightning plague the night. Where a bell sounds across the fields winter's cold tooth is blunted and August veils its fiery sun.

Supper was now announced to me, and I took a table in a corner of the room from which I might see all who entered. The other tables filled immediately, for hunger is a sharp herdsman. "Boy," I said, addressing a gawk who came to take my order, "it appears that trade is brisk. Is it the fair that brings you all this patronage?"

"In part, Monsieur. And yet we lie on the direct road to Italy, and there is monstrous thick travel back and forth. In a single day I've known three or four to pass. Melun, Sens, Tonnerre, and I know not what other towns lie on the road beyond. Would Monsieur relish a roasted ham? It is from our own sty."

Monsieur thought yes.

"And an artichoke in sauce?"

Monsieur still thought yes.

"And what will Monsieur drink?"

I looked about the room, then waited for a lull in the rattling of the spoons. A fat dame, too, whose shoes had been clapping on the floor with dishes from the kitchen, was now, for a moment, at a stand.

"Boy," I said, and I pitched my voice so that all could hear, "I'll have none of your Rhenish wine. My gullet sings out for a juice called *vin de la rose blanche*. You'll fetch me a bottle!"

The boy scratched his head. "God spare me," he said, "but I know not the name."

"What!"—and I bawled so that the man at the farther corner heard me—"no *vin de la rose blanche*! It's nonsense. Send the landlord in!"

Presently the fat landlord appeared, rubbing his fingers on his greasy apron. He was in none too good a temper for being brought away from his stove. Yet he held his temper down.

"Landlord," I said, and I lifted my voice high as in a passion, "in Paris they say you serve a wine called *vin de la rose blanche*. But your boy denies your fame. Let's have no more words. My throat is parched."

The landlord stupidly shook his head and was about to deny the wine, when a man at a near-by

table put down his knife, pushed back his chair, and crossed the room to me. "Will Monsieur share my wine?" he asked. "Although it's yellow, it is a near cousin to that you ask for." Then he squinted on me, and added in a lower tone, "I know *la rose blanche*. It's a wine that all England is thirsty for."

As this sorted with what I had been told would happen, I bade the landlord give convoy to my dishes. He brought my meat and artichoke, his broad thumb inside the sauce. Having come now to the stranger's table, and put myself opposite, I pledged him for his civility. Then I put my attention on my roasted ham. It was proper that it should be he who spoke first of my errand. However, as he held silence—except for his loud munching—at last I became impatient.

"Monsieur," I said, and sunk my voice, "to whom, think you, do I bear a letter?"

But he lifted up his hand. "There's a time to come," he said.

My supper was finished with a tartlet of such rare excellence that I asked the boy of what fruits it was concocted, and the measure of them. And I bade him commend me to the cook. Then, as the stranger made no inquiry for my message, I

thanked him for his wine, told him that he might find me on the street before the door, and strolled out.

The dancing was over, and the men and girls—their feet still frisking—were singing the piper's songs. Being myself full of supper, and of consequence merry of heart and in a kindly mood, I joined the group, and hummed the tunes with them. As the proverb says, it's a full belly that cries to the head, "Sing, you rascal." Though I am not compact of harmonies, yet if the lilt is carried strong by others, I'll not go more than a half tone off. The words of the song I knew not, for my memory waits until a bottle has gone round three times.

My friend, the comely wench, edged up to me in the shadow. She was tired, poor wretch, and I put my arm around her waist to steady her. Nor did I refuse to kiss her between the verses.

"Maitre Jean Balue
A perdu la vue
De ses Évêchés; —"

It was a rollicking tune and twenty of us sang together.

"Who is this Jean Balue?" I asked.

The wench opened her eyes wide. "Have n't you heard of him? He is the wicked cardinal who betrayed the King. He's buried alive in Loches."

"Loches?" I said. "That's where the King journeys."

"Yes," she answered. But she would not sing again.

There was, I noticed, a comet hanging in the east.

The venders on the square, having now held their wares on sale all day to the abatement of many a wallet, were loading their carts with the pieces that remained. At an interval, as they laid away some choice saint, they barked its merits to the villagers, if perchance there still lurked an unspent penny.

When I returned to the inn I was met at the door by the stranger who had shared his wine with me. The room was now empty, but he drew me to a corner screened from the windows.

"You bring a letter," he asked, "for Jacques Bonnet?"

"From whom, Monsieur?" I asked, to test him beyond mischance.

"Mademoiselle Diane Motier," he said.

I drew the letter from my doublet and handed it to him. He declined it.

"I am not Jacques Bonnet," he said. "He has gone. But he left a message for you."

It was his turn to offer a letter. It was addressed to Antoine or his successor.

"For me?" I asked.

"It is for whomever comes to him from Made-moiselle."

I broke the seal and read the contents. They were brief. "'Loches is the town,'" I read. "'The Gray Moon is the inn.'"

"Here is confusion," I said, and I showed him the letter.

"It's plain enough," he replied. "Loches lies four days to the southwest. He tells you the inn where you may find him."

"So, so? And am I to go gallivanting across the country?"

The stranger shrugged his shoulders. "I'm but a servant in the business," he said. "Jacques Bonnet is my master. It was only yesterday he went to the south. But he left this letter and he bade me urge its importance."

He paused and eyed me up and down. "It concerns the Lady Diane," he said. "It would be

a sad snarl for her unless you go to Loches."

I put Diane's letter back in my doublet. "If you will have horses ready in the morning, I'll make the trip," was how I ended.

No sooner had I given this consent than he offered me the half of a silver clasp. It was hardly larger than my thumb nail.

"Monsieur Bonnet wears its fellow," he said. "Wear your half upon your doublet for a sign. And until you see its fellow, keep your finger on your lips. Perhaps Monsieur Bonnet will not be himself at the inn. If so, his servant will proclaim himself."

I nodded my understanding of the matter, and he went off to make arrangements.

And what, think you, was my reason for consenting to this journey? Have you no invention? Must I blurt it on you? It was to Loches that Mademoiselle was bound.

CHAPTER XIII

MAISTRO TAKES PASSAGE WITH ME

I WAS abroad early next day and I had my head in the stable yard before breakfast. Two strong Norman horses were already saddled for Michel and me. "Monsieur Bonnet's servant is punctual," I thought. Then I sat on a horse-block where I could look down the road, until the boy should tell me that my food was ready. A hostler lounged by, and I called to him.

"How far do you make it to Pithiviers?" It was to be our first night's stop.

"Mor 'n thirty miles."

"And a good inn when you get there?"

"It 's not like this, but not so bad, neither."

"And the road?"

"Fair to good."

I gave him a copper for his pains. It was such a rare gift that his mouth fell open. Had I desired to fee him further—this vent being offered—I could have put the coin upon his tongue, like salts for an inward ailment.

"Eh," I said, "here comes a traveler—from Paris. There's his dust at the turn. He rides early." Then as he came nearer, "By the look of him, he has been riding all night."

He pulled rein before the horse-block. "Breakfast and a change of horses!" he blurted. Then, when the boy only gaped, "By Christ's blood, bid them serve me quick!"

Now, although his words were mostly French, yet by his manner of speaking I knew him to be an Italian. And so I trailed him in. It would ease me to speak to some one in my native tongue, having whined through my nose a full two weeks in French. I bade the boy put my dishes on the Italian's table. It is not often that Sarto so favors a fellow traveler.

"Melun lies on the Italian road," I said. "Perhaps you journey home?"

He nodded.

"Methinks, then, that you are of a sour homesickness when you travel by night."

"My business is proper to myself alone," was his sullen answer.

I picked my meat in silence. "This is an unsocial villain," I thought.

Presently I spied Michel in the yard.

"Michel!" I cried, and I pounded on the shutter. "Michel!" At the second calling the Italian at my table laid down his knife and crooked his head out of the window. Michel came into view, and stood with his shoulders even to the sill. "You have heard my change of plans?" I asked. "We do not go back to Paris, but to the south."

Michel nodded.

"We'll start before the hour," I added.

I turned to the Italian.

"Man," I said, "what ails you?"

The fellow had risen when Michel's head had appeared at the window. "God's face," he groaned. He was white to his eyes, and he shook so that his knees clapped.

"One would think," I said, "that you had seen a ghost."

His voice quavered almost beyond control, but he contrived to speak. "Who are you, Monsieur? What is your name?"

"If it may concern you, my name is Luca Sarto."

When I gave it, he tottered but steadied himself against the table—to the slopping of the cow's milk that had been put before me. He

might have slopped the whole of it, for it sets heavy on my stomach.

"Hold a bit!" I said. "I'll not hurt you."

But on a sudden, as though a monstrous fear had taken him, he blurted from the room.

I tapped my head as though the seat of his complaint lay there. "Michel," I said, "has he slipped his keeper?"

But Michel was deep in thought. "Michel," I added, "you have never seen the fellow, have you?"

"Not that I remember, Master, and yet there is something in his voice."

"It was your appearance at the window that first frightened him."

"Ay, Master, but he tottered when he got your name. One would have said that he had seen a ghost." Michel scratched his head. By this plowing his memory sprouted. "Master," he said, "I remember now that I have seen this man before. It was he I talked with when you went in to King Louis. He was to show me the sights of Paris. His name is Maistro."

"Michel," I said, "see where the fellow went." Whereupon I proceeded with my food.

In a few minutes Michel returned.

"He's in the stables. And he walks up and down and bites his fingers."

I pointed to the untouched dishes. "He has not eaten a bite. He is crazed by lack of sleep. Here, swob me off! I'm stained. Now bring the horses around and we'll start!"

I wiped my teeth upon my napkin, as is my custom, and left the table.

The horses were ready, and the landlord stood by my stirrup. My reckoning was moderate, and out of a piece of silver there was enough left to fee the yard. The wind of it went about, until there were four to hold my bridle.

I flung the smaller coins upon the ground and was laughing at the uproar, when the Italian, who but a few minutes since had bolted from me in such a fright, came trotting from the stable. He rode a fresh horse. He came forward with a shamefaced grin.

"Will Messer Sarto forgive the illness of my manners?"

"There's no need of pardon," I said, still sulky, but wondering at the change that had come over him. "Yet if you want my pardon, I'll not withhold it."

"It was a dizziness I'm subject to. Yet it was engendered by finding myself in the presence of the famous Luca Sarto."

"Tush, man. You slopped my doublet, yet 't is no matter."

The Italian turned up his eye in ecstasy. "Oh, Monsieur," he said, "I've seen your Madonna."

"So?" I asked, but thawed.

"Blessed Mary! What grace! What beauty!"

"Maistro," I said, and smiled on him, "you have a most discerning eye. Shall we make on, Michel?"

But still the stranger lingered. He cleared his throat. "Perhaps I may ask a favor of a countryman?"

I bowed for his encouragement. "Come, come," I said, "ask your favor!" I had warmed to him, for praise was welcome in this barren land.

"I, too, journey to the south," he said. "As the roads are dangerous, perhaps you will permit me to travel in your company."

"I journey to Loches. If your road lies in that direction, you are welcome to our company."

"Loches!" he exclaimed. "It's the very town.

Messer Sarto honors me. I'll brag of this when I return to Italy."

"Ride behind with Michel, Maistro. We'll make a start."

I lifted my hand in farewell to my friend, the comely wench, whose head popped from an upper window, and we rode out of the yard.

CHAPTER XIV

AN INN AT THE CROSSROADS

THERE was much turning to leave the town. The road followed in the shadow of the cloister wall for a hundred paces—the length of a penitent's conversion—but took up its winding, loose practices beyond. It was a vile road, too, with mud and quickset. It makes sad business for a traveler when even the road knows not the way, or, knowing it, is set on mischief. A village madcap with his thumb against his nose is of better instruction. At last we came to the fields, having been all four ways within a quarter mile.

Our direction was southwest. And yet if the lies be believed of a certain romancing Genoese mapmaker, not southwest at all. For what does the fellow say but that the world's a globe—that it is shaped like a huge round tart and is plattered in space. But also this tart is always spinning, and what lies eastward on the platter whirligigs to west. It is blasphemous cogger. Sarto answers the fellow: Does wind blow always

from the east? Does not its shifting blow confusion to his theory? Then at this, too, let him scratch his head! I jump into the air, straight up. And yet in that moment does the world leap eastward from me? I drop back into the self-same tracks. Look how a little reason shows him up a fool! This Christopher Stand-on-His-Head ruffles me. Southwest we journeyed—southwest, I repeat—from Melun.

We had food shortly before noon at an inn set close upon the road. I gave my horse to a boy and went inside. There was a pleasing smell coming up the hall.

"There are three of us," I called; "set the tables quick!"

A little girl ran off with the message. She was a pretty tot, with a smear of jam upon her face, for her mouth had been too small for the traffic.

I sit longer at meat than most, and when I had finished, Michel and Maistro had already left their table. Michel had gone to the horses. Maistro was engaged upon a map with a serving lad, a tall thin gawk like a shadow at sunset. It is likely that Maistro did not see me.

He was asking questions about the road. "It

lies, you say, some fifteen miles beyond Pithiviers?"

The boy wagged his head.

"And it's a mite of an inn at a four corners, and no town about?"

Again the boy nodded.

"Maistro," I said, "do you seek a place to lie to-night?"

Maistro started at my voice. His look, I thought, was thievish.

But if there was something shamefaced in his action—some cheat upon the landlord, whereof I know not—his recovery was quick. He sprawled the map upon the table and weighted the ends with saucers—there had been fish in them and a buttery mess was left. I set them beyond my nose.

Maistro put one thumb on Melun and the other on Loches. "Our journey lies between," he said. "To make it in four days, we may lie to-night at Pithiviers. But if we would be only three days upon the road, there is an inn fifteen miles beyond. Here!" His thumb jumped the distance and squatted on the spot. "Here! It's a third of the whole. Does it meet your pleasure to make the extra miles?"

I climbed into bed and commended myself to sleep. But the wagoners were talking and singing in the yard below. "Blessed Jesus," I said, "don't these fellows know it's night? Must I be pestered with them?"

Finally to mend the noise I threw up my window. A tall fellow was singing. "Louse!" I bawled. "Go off to bed!" At first he didn't hear, but I caught him with a boot and scattered the concert.

I closed the window and fell to sleep at once.

CHAPTER XV

MAISTRO AGAIN

SLEEP carries no dial in its wallet. I know not how long I lay unconscious. I was awakened at a crash. It brought me to my feet. "God's wounds!" I cried, and I fumbled beneath my pillow for my dagger.

There were sounds of footsteps down the stairs. I leaped to the steps, but at the bottom fell headlong on the chair, where it was lodged against the door. Still dazed with my sudden awakening, I disengaged myself. The sounds of steps had ceased.

I went quietly down the stairs, wearing a shift, naught else. The falling chair had aroused nobody.

I put my ears against all the doors. From within each there came the deep and disjointed melodies of noses. "There are three pipers to the room, at least," I thought. "Only a treble's lacking for a choir." Coming to the end of the hall,

I saw that a passage ran off to the back of the building and that a taper burned in a socket.

"Maistro and Michel are sleeping there," I mumbled. "I'll tell them what's happened."

The passage fell off two steps, and but for the light I would have pitched upon my head. I shuffled on, masking the candle with my fingers.

I thrust my head in Maistro's room. "So, so, what's this? The fellow is not a-bed." I looked about. "Nor has his bed been slept in." I scratched my head to stir my thoughts. It was Maistro's room, for I had seen him placed. "Me-thinks I have wronged a wagoner. There is another villain in the house. Maistro has spied me fingering my gold."

I went into Michel's room. He was fast asleep. I returned to Maistro's room and sat on a stool to comb out the clutter of my thoughts. There was a splotch of mud upon the floor, which Maistro had scraped from his boot, but no other sign of him. He had gone complete. "The rogue had a gallows face," I mused. "He was a sullen devil. I liked him not from the first. But he has had his day's sweat for nothing."

However, as I would sleep the better for sure knowledge that Maistro had run off, I went down

the stairs to the ground level. I opened the inn-yard door. As I paused, I heard a horse's whinny. Dimly I could see a man and horse.

"Maistro!" I cried. "Stand, you whelp!"

At the sound he leaped to his saddle. Then he galloped from the yard. I pelted after, but he had gone into the darkness. I could see that it was the road toward Loches he took, but nothing else. The clack of his horse's hoofs fell off.

I was about to go to bed—being blue with cold—when I saw that he had dropped his wallet on the stones. I carried it inside and, relighting my taper from the embers on the hearth—from the coldness of which I judged that it was well toward morning—I opened up the wallet.

First there was a stinking shift, and I tossed it in the fire. And sour stockings. God! Next there was a bundle of letters. A name of direction caught my eye. "So, so," I said; "what have I come on?" For the topmost letter had the name "Oliver de Bourges." "This fellow is a sorry thief, to steal such worthless stuff. For one that is old in practice, it's silly business." Yet it was strange, I thought, that of the thousands in Paris it chanced to be Oliver whom he had robbed.

Judge my amazement, now, when I came on my own model—the gilded model from which I had been working on the morning when the messenger had come to me from the King.

Sarto has a cunning headpiece—when it's daylight. He can reason, then, and make a proper sequence. But in the night, after he has been asleep, he gets sore muddled. I sat upon the floor and gazed upon the model, yet not a thought would come to explain its being in the wallet.

Nor will you rightly blame me for my confusion. You yourself would not be so glib at the unravelment if I had not told you about Maistro. There is no cause to puff yourself. I've made my memoirs easy, so that common folk may understand.

I sought Michel. There was water in his cup, and to wake him quick I threw it in his face. He sat up, spluttering.

"Michel," I cried, "where have you seen Maistro before?"

He rubbed his eyes.

"I told you, Master. He was the man who offered to show me the sights of Paris."

"Yes, yes," I interrupted, "but before that."

Michel bit his thumb in thought.

"Michel," I said, "do you remember a rogue by the name of Maistro, an idle varlet that hung about the banks?"

"Ay."

"This is the same rascal."

"It's likely to be so, Master. But what does the varlet here in France?"

"That's the riddle," I answered. "But he attacked me for my purse."

I pushed Michel back to bed and left him. Then I returned to my own room. I balanced the chair upon the steps, for I was somewhat wrought upon by the night's events. Then I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI

WE TRAVEL SOFTLY

I WAS awakened by the singing of the stable boys. Also a fly had a part in it, for with all the fair world to sit upon, he chose my nose. The chair was still balanced on the steps. I counted my possessions. My money and the letter that I bore to Jacques Bonnet were safe.

At breakfast, to please the varlet, I had Michel sit with me, and I told him what had befallen in the night. We were at meat when word came from the stable that the door had been broken and that Maistro's horse was gone. It capped my story. "It's a lesson," I said. "We'll take no more vagrants in our company. It's lucky our skins are whole."

We were on the road before the dew had lost its whiteness. The sun was warm and the sky was clear. A pleasant wind blew across the earth and taught the valley the music of the hills. A shallow stream gossiped of its gay youth upon the mountains. A dog barked far off, and across the

fields came the song of women at their planting. And the God Pan sat in a thicket and cocked his ear to all these tunes. His reed lay idle for the shaggy fellow stored the music in his memory.

Orleans lay twenty miles ahead. It would fall right for noonday food. As for the night, I had been told that the town of Saint Dyé lay half way to Blois.

In the morning a band of players and jugglers went by us. They were evil looking fellows. Since the snows were off the ground they had been sleeping in the fields, except on a few nights when barns and out-buildings were near at hand. As for inns, it would damn their reputation to let them in. There were twenty of the villains, mostly walking, although two or three rode mules. One fellow in the company with a feather in his cap could have spoken Herod with the best. There were two or three boys to speak the women's parts.

Behind came a wagon with a Hell's Fire but half concealed beneath a cloth. Its red mouth gaped in a manner to set me thinking of my sins. A great tongue wagged as if the beast were hungry. "There is meat to gorge it," I thought, "among these actor folk." And I flecked my

horse with the whip to keep him at his gait, for the beast had theology and shied at the sight of hell.

It was nearly noon when we came in sight of Orleans. It was the biggest city we were to see—indeed, there is nothing grander in France unless it be Paris—and my curiosity was stirred as we came near. It was outside of Orleans that the maid Jeanne had led the Dauphin's army. Later she set him on his throne and brushed off his enemies. It makes Sarto blush that a woman should do what a man could not. Unless the whole be a piece of coggerly, there was witchcraft at the bottom of it. Yet she must have been a comely lass, and it's a pity how she ended.

Orleans is a walled city, but at this noon hour there was no one at the gate to challenge us. As we jogged up, a man was pegging a placard on the wall. There were large words at the top.

“‘Reward!’ Stay a bit!” I said. “Let's see what's offered!” And I drew in my horse to read.

“Michel!” I cried, amazed, “I've had no drink to-day. Read the words yourself and see if you make the same. The town's bewitched.”

Michel pressed close. I pointed my finger at

the sign. "Look, Michel! Oliver de Bourges is dead, and this board says that it is I who killed him."

Michel opened his eyes with astonishment. "Peace of God," he blurted, then sat numb with his jaw fallen.

I read aloud the placard to the end. This is how it ended: "Therefore, for the apprehension of this monstrous villain, by name Luca Sarto, the gracious King, having at heart the safety of his beloved people, is pleased to offer a reward of twenty crowns'—etc., etc."

"Eh, Michel," I said, when I had finished reading, "what think you of it?"

Michel sat biting his thumb, too amazed to speak. Then after a pause: "Master," he said, "if there's roguery abroad to lie about us so, methinks we stand specially in danger before this placard."

There was truth in what he said. Already two or three passersby were gawping at us from a distance. "We'll come away and think what's to be done," I said.

A hundred paces inside the wall a signboard hung above a door with a tankard scrawled on it. We hitched our horses and went in.

A boy came from the kitchen. "You'll fetch whatever may happen to be on the stove," I said, "except pork." He clattered off.

"Master," said Michel, "when was this murder done?"

"Two nights ago," I said. "Pull your chair up close, Michel, and I'll tell you more than you've dreamed of."

Michel hitched himself nearer and sat with his mouth wide open.

"It was Maistro who killed Oliver," I said. "When Maistro ran off last night he left his wallet. In it were papers he had stolen from Oliver. That's how I know he killed him. But this matters not. The King is mistaken, and the reward is set for me."

"Master," said Michel, "methinks the placard gave the color of your doublet."

"So it did."

"I saw doublets hanging in a window across the way. If one could be bought to fit—"

"You are a shrewd varlet, Michel. I'll make the purchase as we go out."

We found a brown garment in sufficient contrast from my own. The tailor smoothed my shoulders and pronounced me perfect. "Stand

off a bit, Michel," I said, "and look me up and down!"

"If you bought a cap, Master, to match the doublet, you would be set up complete. Made-moiselle would blink twice at seeing you."

"Hush, Michel!" I said, and cuffed him. "You talk too much. It was the cackling goose that the fox caught for his supper."

I laid by my cap reluctantly with its yellow feather, stroking it in my fingers.

The tailor had another cap at hand, and he told me its virtues. I slapped my silver on the counter and we came out.

A crowd had gathered about the placard and a priest was reading it aloud. Except for him, not a man could read. If a man in France so rouses himself that he has a desire to know what's written, he goes bawling for a priest, then twirls his hat and cocks his ear. Not a letter can he get himself.

As I did not trust entirely to my change of doublet, I thought it best to pass not too near the crowd. Therefore we turned sharply to the left into the narrow streets. The priest was intoning the words as if they had been the Beatitudes, pronouncing my name and misdeeds in a

villainous minor. I was myself almost persuaded that I was a rascal. But I was soon beyond the sound of it.

I observed now that one of my horse's shoes was loose, for it clattered on the stones. I bawled out to a man for direction to a smithy. He pointed to the next turning.

But when we came to it, I swore an oath. It was plastered with a placard.

"Here's work for you," I bawled within. "We're in a monstrous hurry."

The smith sopped his sweat and said, "In your turn, Monsieur. There's one before you."

"Who's he?" I asked.

The smith pointed to the placard. "It's a man who goes on the King's errand. It was he put up the placard."

I cast my eye suspiciously around the smithy. "And where is he now?" I asked.

"He went off to get his food, but he gave me silver to hurry with his work."

"I'll not be put off," I cried. "Here's double the amount he gave. Shoe me first!"

The smith caught the glint of silver, then agreed.

"Did this king's messenger," I asked, "tell you where he was traveling?"

The smith paused a bit and wiped his nose. "Blois and Loches," he said, and went on hammering at my horse's shoe.

Presently Michel and I were on our way again. "We've put this fellow behind us, at least," he said. "We'll see no more placards to-day."

We were an hour outside the city and were trotting side by side, when a thought came to me. "Michel," I said, "methinks it's odd that Maestro should kill Oliver."

"It is, Master."

"And it's odd," I continued, "that Maestro broke into my room at the inn at Pithiviers."

"So it is."

"And, Michel, the placard said that Oliver was killed on the steps of the Palais Saint Louis. That's very odd, too."

"And so it is," said Michel, scratching his head.

"And then, do you remember how the fellow was scared at sight of me when he heard my name, on our first meeting him at Melun?"

"That I do, Master."

"Well," I said, "do you smell nothing?"

Michel shook his head.

"Dunce," I said. "Your nose is stopped. I smell this. Both of these attacks were meant for me."

"Blessed Mary," said Michel with a stupid look.

"And there's more than that," I said. "It's the Orsini who sent him on his dirty work. The fellow's an Italian. He had just come from Rome when you saw him first. And when he had struck down Sarto, as he supposed, he was fleeing to Italy. Melun's on the road. So when he saw me, whom he thought he had just killed, it put him in a blather as though he had seen a ghost."

"As God's above," said Michel.

"But he steadied himself," I continued, "when he found that his work had not yet been done, and so contrived an excuse to join us."

We jogged awhile in silence. "Then you think," said Michel, "that we shall meet Maistro again?"

"We shall," I answered him.

We came into Saint Dyé at sundown. It was to have been our lodgment for the night.

There was no placard on the post before the inn.

But luck had set against us. We had our

fingers in the food, when we saw a traveler draw rein before the door. He rode a roan mare and he held a packet against her neck. "It's the family shirts, fresh washed," I thought. Then I put my hand on Michel's arm and stayed his attention from his meat. "Michel," I said, "see how he is pegging something on the post." But Michel was rapt upon his rump and did not heed me, for a hungry belly has no ears. "Michel!" I said again, and I shook him by the shoulders; "it's the same rogue who pegged the placard outside Orleans." I craned forward from the window. "This jest grows stale," is how I ended.

I put the reckoning on the table, and stood in the shadow of the inn door. Some few villagers had come up. By the empty way they stared I could tell that not a man could read. "Michel," I said, "we must be off before a priest appears."

Michel moaned for the remnant of his rump and sucked his greasy fingers, but I hushed him. We took to the road again. I was in a surly mood to have my night so broken in.

"Master," said Michel, "where do we spend the night?"

"We can at least crawl beneath a hedge."

The night was wrapped in clouds, until not a star showed through. Nature had counted the travelers still abroad and, checking them not beyond her fingers, had thought it was a proper thrift to hang out no lamps.

Woods lay upon the left, for the wind stirred them. It is music beyond the skill of man, either on reed or string. The sweet fluting soothed my anger.

And all this hour we had seen no light, nor any outline of a house.

We had now come two hours beyond Saint Dyé. "We 'll cabin ourselves," I said, "beneath the first straw rick. We had best be on the lookout."

Michel stayed me. "Master," he said, "some one comes behind."

I cocked my ear. There was a sound upon the road of horse's feet. "So, so! There 's another traveler. Perhaps the wretch will tell us where to sleep." Yet in precaution I faced about and drew my dagger. The rider came up with a clack.

"If you have love for a fellow man," he cried, drawing in his horse, "you 'll tell me if Blois is near."

"Love will not get you there to-night. It's three hours ahead."

The stranger tapped a packet which he bore before him on the horse. "I am on the King's errand."

Michel plucked my doublet from behind. But I, too, smelled a rat.

"King's errand or no king's errand, you can not get there to-night. Do you know the roads?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"What do you bear in your packet?"

"I am not a scholar," he answered. "It's words." He rubbed his head. "I have taken not the time to read the thing entire. But there has been dirty business done in Paris, and I give notice for the catching of the villain. I travel for the King." He twitched his mustachios and puffed himself.

"How are the villains complexioned?" I asked.

"God help me," he said, "it goes beyond my learning. I know not."

"Stranger," I said, "you had best stay the night with us. We shall cast about for a rick."

"But I travel in a hurry," he objected.

"If you are a king's messenger," I said, "it's well that you know that there is a slough beyond. It would bog you. You had best stay with us."

He grumbled, then yielded to us.

We rode our horses through a hedge and tethered them beneath a tree. There was a dry rick near by. On its far side I dug a hole in the straw. "I play the host," I told the stranger. "This is your room. I'll put you so that you are shielded from the wind. You'll pardon the lack of candles." He grinned at my jest and snuggled in the straw.

I drew Michel off in the darkness.

"Master," he asked, "shall I stick him?"

"Fool!" I said. "No! Would you stir more hornets? Bunk alongside the fellow. Be his friend. But if he gets up to stir around, hum a tune!"

I prepared my own bed on the other side of the rick, that side nearest the horses. I could have slept at once, but I pinched myself. Presently the stranger snored.

I rose quietly. I found his horse tethered beneath a tree. The packet was still tied upon the saddle. "This will pay him for not easing his horse at night," I thought. I untied the packet

and removed it. Then I loosed the tether and led off the horse. There was another rick in the field. I scatched a hole in it and thrust inside the packet, ramming straw above it.

Next I led the horse to the road and slapped her smartly on the rump. She trotted off, but turned to look at me. I pelted clods at her until she was gone from sight. "There will be no placards, now, in Blois and Loches. I'll sleep the better for it."

The stranger was still snoring.

I lay back tired. I was cramped and sore. The straw pricked me through my clothes. There's no content for travelers. A friendly witch, they say, carried Habakkuk from Judea to Babylon. Saint Ambrose on a sabbath morning was lifted in a peaceful trance from Milan to Tours for Saint Martin's funeral. Would to God a comely witch would take me on her broomstick down to Loches and save me further bouncing.

I drew the straw around me and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

A NEST IN A CAT'S EAR

THERE was a pother in the morning, as you may be sure. To breed confidence in my integrity, I upbraided the messenger for his manner of tethering his horse, showing him, as he stormed, the Italian method. My teaching fell to nothing, for he was distracted by his loss. As for Michel, he played a cunning part in the farce, being so full of grief at the fellow's mischance that a tear stood on his nose. Michel has it in him to be a mummer. He could play Hecuba and snivel with the best, if he were dressed in woman's clouts.

The messenger delayed us an hour with his silly search, but found neither horse nor packet. I had done my work completely, and he could have leaned against the rick where the packet was hidden without knowledge of it.

Finally, to end his search, I offered him the hinder end of Michel's horse until we should reach Blois. He still grumbled, but took my proffer. And so we came to Blois.

At Blois the road for Loches swerves off. At the end of the bridge we begged a breakfast, and while we waited I rubbed pig's grease on my legs.

As for the messenger, he thanked us for our civilities, though he said the night had ruined him. I never saw the fellow afterward. Then we stuffed us full of curds and took the road again.

I do not flaunt the things I've seen. Yet you may care to know how the Frenchmen of the Loire Valley erect their homes. They build wherever a hill springs up, and hard against it, so that the rearward rooms are scooped from the hill itself. As their bedrooms lie behind, they sleep like gnomes within a cave.

It was middle afternoon when we came to Loches. The castle is set on a hill above it. I looked at it with no more than a careless eye, scarcely marking the huge, square tower of the dungeons.

I drew Bonnet's letter from my poke. " 'Loches is the town,' " I read. " 'The Gray Moon is the inn.' "

I called to a country lad. "Direct me to the Gray Moon!" I flung him a coin.

It was near by, around the corner, and he led

the way, kicking up dust with his toes, for he played that he was a cart-horse.

It was a comfortable inn, with a garden running to the river Indre, which lies along the town. There was a rumor in the place that the King was already on the way from Paris, and that he would arrive on the Thursday, two days off.

"And the Court?" I asked. "Does it travel with him?" For my thoughts ran on Made-moiselle.

"Ay, that it does."

There was a tub outside the kitchen door. "Come here, my lad!" I soaped my ears and hair, then put my head down inside the tub. "Now then," I said, "pour the water on me!"

After this I sought a barber. He was mixing a compound in a pewter pot, stirring it with a long spoon and holding it to his nose.

"What 's this?" I asked.

"It 's a cure for the stone," he said.

He put down his spoon, and waved an instructive finger.

"Know this!" he said. "The stone is a grievous malady. And here 's the cure."

"It 's vile to smell," I said.

"I gather," he continued, "a good quantity of

those beetles which are found in the dung of oxen, also of crickets which sing in the fields. I cut off the heads and wings of the crickets and put them in a pot with the beetles and common oil." He pointed to the mess upon his stove. "When they have boiled for a day I pound them into powder. Has Monsieur the stone?"

"No," I said.

He seemed disappointed. "But perhaps Monsieur has worms. I've a sovereign remedy for that."

"Barber," I said, "get your shears! My beard needs trimming. I'll sit on the bench outside. There's too much stench in here."

He sighed, but brought his shears.

When he had done, he sprinkled me with sweet scent and held up a glass. I commended him upon my looks and came away.

From the window of my room there was a view of the garden and the castle on the hill. Presently Michel rapped. I called to him to enter.

"I've been about the town," he said.

"So?"

"And I spied into all the drinking shops," he continued.

"You are none the worse. It was thin wine."

Michel gave me a sly look. "I thought to find Maistro," he said.

"Eh?"

"But I found him not, Master."

It was shrewd of Michel, and I praised him. Then as the kitchen bell rang, I sent him off and sought my dinner. A serving wench stood in the hall. I gave her my boots. "Clean them and grease them, my dear, and set them by my door!"

She was young and slim. I called her back. "Here 's for your pains, my love," I said. And I offered to kiss her. We must keep the sweet creatures content.

But judge my amazement! She slapped me and ran off.

I was startled. Here was something new. Pest! I thought. Have my looks gone off? Am I humped? Has the comet withered me? But I found comfort. It was my old brown doublet, bought in Orleans. Yet, the girl's wits, doubtless, were somewhat touched. But I did not follow her. The wench was angry. When a woman blows to a tempest, it's wise to keep in shelter.

She slammed the door, and, by the sound, she hurled my boots down the back stairs.

I was tired. Minorites and pilgrims thrive on dust and mud, but I am content at home. I'd rather be a Benedictine and sit in slippers with my hands folded on my paunch.

In the public room, where my table was laid, were country people who had brought their produce to market—a sloven company, who now drank their profit in wine, not malmsey or muscadel, but some unvintaged juice pressed from near-by vineyards. I ordered the boy to change my plates to a table far from their stinking company.

Then, remembering the clasp whereby Monsieur Bonnet or his servant was to know me, I fetched it from my poke and pinned it on like a lady's favor. I stood up and faced all ways, on the chance that he or his servant was already in the room. There was no response.

I now summoned the landlord and asked him what wines there were in the house, fit for an Italian's thirst. At this he rubbed his hands together as if the air before him were a washing sink. He was so fat a man he could have played the drum upon his belly.

"Monsieur," he said, and cast his eyes slantwise on the other tables, "those are cheap juices."

Then his face lighted. "Ah, Monsieur, I have a golden vintage in my cellar!"

"There's a proverb, landlord," I said, "that wine in the cellar quenches no man's thirst."

He ran off, but came again, bearing a bottle. He pressed his fat knees together on it, hunched himself, and pulled the cork. He wiped its mouth as tenderly as a mother would a babe's, and filled my glass. Then he stood off, to watch the marvel of my drinking such nectar.

It was fair and middling, worth smacking the lips, perhaps, if the gullet is dusty, but not a wine to make an occasion of. It would do for a fourth round when the singing starts. Yet there was honest grape in it, and it had aged somewhat. Sarto does not growl upon his food and drink. If the wine is thin, he does not tell how he has had it better. Or if a platter is unsavory, he does not cast it at the cook. "Mine host," I said, "your wine is good. Leave the bottle by. When I want another, I'll pound upon the table."

The evening wore on. No one had bespoken me about the clasp. One by one the villagers left with empty baskets, but full as ticks inside. There were now but three of them remained. I looked upon them hard and tapped my clasp in

invitation. They were sottish beyond feigning. One by one their chins went to their chests, and their heads waggled uneasily from side to side, by reason of the slop inside.

My thoughts were not sweet. Here had I pelted. It would have been better manners if this Jacques had been more exact to have me met. Having sat for an hour beyond my meat, I concluded that the game was off for the night. It was likely that he had given me four days to make the trip from Melun. And four days it would have been if Maistro had not lured me to the roadside inn to dispatch me with greater safety to himself.

I swallowed the remnant of my wine, put the landlord aside who vowed he had Bacchus's own bottle in the cellar, and passed into the lower hall to bed. At the end of ten steps I was confronted by one of the countrymen. He stopped short before me.

"By sailor's pox," he said, "I have lost it."

"Lost what?" I asked.

He drew me away from the door. Then, screened from sight, he put his fingers to his lips and, plunging his hand into his cloak, brought out the other half of the clasp I wore.

"If it's lost, there's an end on it," he said loudly. "How the old woman will storm!" Thereat, in opposition to his words, a grin went paddling around the margin of his mouth.

He moved away, leaving me perplexed. His steps were dying in the upper hall.

I followed. At the top of the stairs I lighted a taper and, protecting the light with my fingers, I hastened down the bare hall. I came on him again. He motioned me not to speak.

I followed him down a rear staircase to the kitchen. Here in a reddish light from embers on the hearth, Michel was conjugating "amo" to a wench's ear, which was close-set for fullest knowledge. In such matters, I fear, Michel is a cunning schoolman. He was already in the perfect tense, for his arm was about her waist, with *plus quam perfectum* still to come.

Without heeding his pot-and-kettle love, we passed through to the stable yard. In the sudden darkness I bumped against a cart. There was a snickering from the stable door. "'Fore God—" I began, and peered hard to see from whom the sound had come. "I'll teach you manners." Dimly I could now see the outline of a row of men on the rim of the horse trough. The snick-

ering ceased. There was one of better manners who, in a squeaking voice, most unnatural and like a woman's, begged pardon for the slight. And now, that I come to think of it, it must have been Maistro himself, in falsetto for disguise.

My guide and I came to the street before the inn. At the turn he set his ear back upon the yard. There was a stir inside.

"Monsieur Sarto," he said in a low tone, "did you mark the fellows on the trough?"

"I marked their lack of manners," I answered.

"It's queer that there were five of them, when there were but two hostlers in the stable." He shook his head in thought.

He pulled my sleeve. "We've other business. Let us hurry!"

At a trot he led me down the street. It was a laggard pace. He was a sorry runner, short of breath, and continually sniveling at his nose.

Above us on the hill were the lights of buildings. He jerked his thumb in their direction. "It's the castle," he panted. "Mother of God protect us from the dungeons!" He crossed himself and hurried on. Through an atmosphere that was as thick as seven veils, I saw blurred lights aloft and the bulk of towering buildings.

Fog is like a gossip's tongue for stretching things. Loches, in truth, is a mighty pile, but through the murk and scum it stood like a Tower of Babel to threaten heaven.

We had come at farthest the length of a longish church—two hundred paces—when a cross street slanted into the darkness. There was a flare of light from a lantern overhead. I looked back toward the inn.

In the glow from the door I saw a man run from the yard. Close upon him came two others. He was urging them with oaths.

I laughed aloud. "The fellow is an Italian of my acquaintance." I was for standing to him, and I peered about for the advantage of a step.

But my guide would have none of it. "Later," he whispered. "When your message has been given there will be time."

"You make Sarto out a coward," I said, but I gave up to him.

We slipped into the darkness of the cross-lane, and came before a building with a flight of steps before it. There was a bakeshop below. Up these stairs we bolted. The door at the top was locked, but flew open when we kicked.

But we were too late. Our pursuers had heard

the rummage, and they came running around the corner. I drew my sword, and stood on the topmost step. "Maistro," I cried, "perhaps you will be the first to mount the steps." He had come pelting to the foot, but paused when I made a stand. "Perhaps the Orsini," I sneered, "send a message by their lackey. If so, I'll take it now."

He stood snarling on the lowest step, yet durst not mount.

"It were a pity," I continued, "to come so far upon an errand, and yet fail in the issue of it." I tapped my swordpoint on the rail. "Come up, you whelp!"

Maistro put his foot upon the second step, and beckoned to his underlings.

"Ha," I cried, "you come in numbers."

As I stood thus, facing the villains, I heard the house door close behind me. I dared not turn, yet knew that I stood alone. But I cried, "He's gone to bring out cates. We'll have a picnic on the stairs. I will furnish fresh meat." At the word I drove at Maistro and forced him to the lowest step. Yet I was fretted why my guide had left me alone.

Maistro was balked. It took a deal of courage to meet my sword upon the steps. Had it been

upon the level, he could have set his varlets on me three ways at once. But none of the knaves liked the glitter of my sword as I stood above them.

“Maistro,”—still I taunted him—“show these Frenchmen what courage an Italian has! Be yourself the first to come!”

He bit his nails and had no stomach for it. “Five gold crowns,” he cried, “for the first man up the steps.”

“And for the same fellow,” I shouted back, “a crown, also, that ’s cracked and bloody.”

Then on a sudden one of the villains made a leap. As the saints live, my sword went clean through him. He tumbled off its point, and rolled from stone to stone. I cried out like a barber, “Who comes the next for the clipping?”

But even as I shouted, and when my sword was scarcely quit of him, the other varlets pressed up the steps. The first of these was Maistro. To get a clearer sweep for my sword, I stepped back to the sill of the door. Maistro was upon the level before I lunged at him. He was a saucy fellow to think he could parry my thrust. If there had been a priest by, he must needs have muttered quick. Maistro could have had but a

short shrift. A shovel was needed for the making of his bed. Short words are best. He lay dead at my feet.

The other two rogues faltered. Then, as I turned upon them, they bolted down.

And now, mark the ill-luck that ended the fight, which else had ended to my honor. In my zeal I leaped after them, but caught my foot on Maistro's body as it lay on the upper step. It pitched me to the street. It might have been the death of me, for I fell twice my length upon the cobbles.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HINT FOR MY TOMBSTONE

I STAGGERED to my feet and bawled to the rogues that I would meet them on the level. But they had run off in the darkness. This, at least, was a piece of luck, for I had snapped my sword off short. Also, in putting my hand upon my cheek to mop the sweat, I found fresh blood upon it. And a pain ran through my shoulder.

"I'll best put into harbor for a bit," I thought. And I clambered up the steps. "If this Jacques Bonnet is within, perhaps he will let me pass the night."

The door stood ajar, and I pushed it open.

First there was an entry with stairs leading to the floor above. I listened, but not a sound came down. Beyond was a room with a fire upon the hearth. By its light I saw a table and two chairs. On the table was a bottle of wine and a remnant of supper. There was a candlestick, also, but it lay upon its side with a smear of grease upon the cloth. "I've broken up a banquet," I thought.

"They have run off before the dessert came on."

Then I called, "Jacques Bonnet, here's Sarto with a message for you!" but got only an echo for my answer.

While I was standing thus, a wave of dizziness came on me. It blinded me, and the room whirled, but I held to the chair-back until it passed. "Eh," I thought, "it's the clout upon the head."

With such pennyworth of wit as the fit left me, there now occurred to me what Mademoiselle had told me about her letter, how I must read it if any danger threatened me. "I'm in a parlous state," I thought. "I had best read it quick."

I leaned against the chair-back to steady me and drew it from my poke. "Now," I muttered, "if my brain holds, I'll see what Diane has written."

"'Dearest Jacques,' I read, but the paper twitched in my unsteady fingers. 'I have come from the north and the white rose has bloomed. From Rouen I sent word to the west—to Normandy and Brittany—as I was bade. The word, they say, has already gone to the south, where Aragon awaits it. Now, Jacques, I send the word to you for your knowledge and safety. And now the time is coming when I shall come to

you.' ”— Again I faltered, for the paper was a blur before me. When the letters had returned to their proper places I went forward. And this time I was able to finish it.

“ ‘I came into Paris last night, aided by an artist whose name is Luca Sarto. He will be the bearer of this letter. My reason is that he is not a Frenchman, but I have other reasons also. Poor Antoine, who carried the last! Now, Jacques, this is not a woman’s work, and I long to be done with it. Paris is lonely, and sometimes at night I hear the bells across the city, and I wish they were the bells of Ghent, sounding the hour when you will come to me. With all the love in my heart, thine. Diane.’ ”

I tossed it in the fire.

It was well the letter was no longer, for I reeled when I had finished it. “Sarto, Sarto, you fool,” I muttered, “it’s a white rose. I must tell Bonnet the color of it. Methinks the fire’s gone out. The letter’s burnt. Maistro, you dog, there’s blood smeared on my cheek. You had best come up, you whelp! It’s a pretty blaze, yet how it heats my head! The rose is the color of Mademoiselle’s hand—Michel, the King has fallen in a fit—”

And now confusion was down on me. The room turned black. Thought slipped into a mist, and I knew nothing more.

With grief I write this ending, that Sarto should stub his toe upon a bakeshop steps like a country lout. If I had killed myself it would have been to my dishonor. How would the Latin have looked upon my tombstone? *Hic jacet Luca Sarto, aurifex praestantius, qui gloriam mundi pinxit, qui*—stubbed his toe and broke his neck.

CHAPTER XIX

IF ADAM HAD KEPT HIS RIB

AS some of you who read this chronicle may have taken a fondness for Sarto, I'll comfort you. He lived. To this day, however, he bears a scar above one eye. Yet his wits returned to him, as the issue of these adventures will prove.

The fire still burned when my sense came back. I looked about and was glad to see that the furniture of earth was still around me. "As I'm a sinner," I thought, "I had fears where I might awake."

I stirred myself and sat up. I am not a leach. I profess neither physic nor anatomy. It will suffice that there was a monstrous thumping in my head.

I pulled myself stiffly to the hearth and put my face in its light. On the stones were the charred remnants of the letter, but as yet they recalled nothing to me.

There was a bottle on the table. The wine, if any were left, would revive me. The bottle was

half full. After drinking, I leaned my head against the chimney and let my wits come in. "So?" I thought. "I had a letter by me. There was matter in it about a rose. I burned it." I took a faggot from the fire and scrawled the word "white" upon the stones. "It will not slip me now."

My dull head was in sad disorder. I sipped more wine and ate a cate that I found upon the table. It was the medicine that I needed. There was a clout upon a chair-back, for drying plates. I sopped it in a cup of water, and I poured on vinegar. Then I tied it on my head. Perhaps the sourness would draw off the pain. I placed a stick upon the fire, and sat with my fingers crossed upon my knee. "While my disorder lasts," I moaned, "I'll not be so skillful in a fight as a Frenchman even, God pity me."

And then I laughed, but it was mirth as sour as vinegar. The last part of Diane's letter had come back to me. She had once denied that I journeyed to her lover. And yet here she bade this Jacques to come to her. "By Venus," I sneered, "I am a postboy. I am a good honest fellow, and Mademoiselle entrusts me with her love letters." It is no wonder it made me sour.

A pair of black eyes in Rome would have laughed at my discomfort. And a pair of brown eyes, too. For somewhat of life lay behind me. I had jigged to more than one tune of love.

I was fast coming into an ugly mood. I sopped the bandage again, and sulked against the bricks.

And now I heard a creaking in the ceiling overhead. "Soft," I said, "perhaps the lover's up above. I must con my lesson." I listened. But if you wait for a sound and hold your breath, it hangs off to make you fret. Finally there came another creaking.

This was followed by a sound from the stairs—boots a-tiptoe and steel against the rail. I concealed myself behind the angle of the chimney-piece. My broken sword mocked me. My bad wrist, also, pled for peace.

A man had come to the doorway—a Frenchman, for his clothing was of the mode of Paris. The chimney corner lay in shadow and, though he gazed hard at it, he did not see me. Then he bent over the fire, so that his face was in its glow and quite distinct.

The face puzzled me. It was familiar, yet I could not place it. No matter! This was the

fellow to whom I must repeat the pretty story of the ringing bells. And he might give me for my pains a silver coin, or say, "Good fellow," or pat my shoulder. It's a pity that Sarto is not a lackey to enjoy being fawned on.

The word "white" that I had scrawled upon the stones had caught his eye. Then it came to me why his face was familiar. He resembled Diane. "Eh," I thought, "is it possible? Perhaps the man is her brother."

I leaned back against the chimney and laughed aloud. It cost me an ugly bruise. He jumped to his feet and leaped on me. The impact threw me to the floor and his knees well nigh knocked the breath from me. Then he shook me and asked me who I was. "You have a rare good humor," he said, as I lay there under his knees.

"A rare good thought came to me," I replied. "I have been journeying four days to find Jacques Bonnet, and now, Jacques Motier, I find that my message is for you."

"You have a message for me?" He was eager all at once.

"When you climb down off my stomach, I'll have better breath to talk." I had been so

pummeled that I ached. I stretched myself and smoothed me off. "Now then," I said. "I'm listening."

He squinted at me sharply. "Whose message do you carry?"

"I'll tell you when you match this clasp."

"You're a careful messenger." He displayed its mate. "You have a letter for me?"

"I had one. It's burned now as crisp as Judas. It was from your sister, Mademoiselle Diane."

"Diane? Pardon my laggard greeting. My servant misreported you, distrusting the rufflers that came behind."

I delivered my message. I told him of the white rose that was blooming in its English garden, feeling like a fool at uttering such silliness. Like all Italians, I was ignorant of the trivial history of England, and what the white rose meant to them. One cannot know what is happening in all the petty corners of the world.

But at the first word Motier gave a cry of joy and hurled his hat to the ceiling.

"May the saints bless the English!" he cried.

I was confused. "Why does Mademoiselle tell you that a rose is white?" I asked.

"Because it is not red," Jacques answered. Then he shifted from the subject, leaving his riddle unanswered.

"There is a man lying dead upon the steps," he said, "and we had best make speed upon our business. When does my sister come to Loches?"

"She comes in the train of Louis."

"So? It's in a day or two." Then again: "In this letter from my sister, did she write of a Norman messenger?"

"It's likely enough. I have forgotten it in my dulness."

"And perhaps she mentioned Aragon?"

I nodded.

"And of course Burgundy was not forgotten?"

"My recollection's blurred. Yet I follow you not, Monsieur."

Motier waved me off and fell to muttering. It was half aloud, and yet I could not hear all. "Guienne—the King's brother. Aragon? It's sure he'll come. Charles, of course. Then Brittany, if things sort right for him. Then—let's see! Ha! Bourbon. Now! No matter how the wind shall blow, the King will get the smudge of it. Stay! In two days Diane arrives. It is timed to the day. We had best travel be-

fore the smudge sets in. You, sir. What do I call you?"

"Luca Sarto."

"Well then, Luca Sarto, we lie deep in your debt." He cast his eye sharply on me. "I must see my sister when she arrives. How shall I contrive it?" He rubbed his chin in thought. "My face looks best by candle-light in Loches. If the broad sun fell on me, it would endanger my complexion. I'll be blunt, Monsieur. Will you bring my sister to me, at a place that I shall specify?"

"If Mademoiselle permits," I answered.

"Do you know the roads about Loches?"

"I know the road to Blois, naught else."

He shook his head. "It's the road that the King must travel." Then he pounded with his fist. "Listen!" he said. "Four miles out of Loches on the road to Montrichard, there is a stone bridge with pointed arch and a friar's lodge on it. A quarter mile beyond this bridge, there is a low building that was once a farmhouse, but is now deserted. Bring my sister there at dusk on the night following her arrival. The stir of the King's arrival will come to me, so I will know the day."

He paused and looked at the window where a streak of dawn came through. "Eh," he said, "I thought I heard a cock. Loches is no place for me in daylight. You will keep appointment with me?" he asked.

"If Mademoiselle will be persuaded."

"Bid Diane wear garments fit for traveling."

He waved me good-by and was gone. His feet sounded lightly on the outside steps.

I grinned at his departure. Here had I been fretting how I might meet Mademoiselle, and Jacques had furnished me a way. Yet I groaned what a rueful lover I would be. My jauntiness had fallen off. There was not so much frisk in me as in an old hound. And here was a bump on my head as though all the learning of Pavia sat within.

Presently I thought how Maistro lay upon the steps. "It was in defense," I thought. "I have a witness that I was set upon. Yet there would be no pleasure in coming before a magistrate. I'd best be away from this before the town awakes."

The dawn was up, but no one was about. Maistro's body lay as I had left it. I walked to the Gray Moon.

A boy was sopping up the night's disorder, and making a bad business of it.

Now, I am scarcely ever merry in the morning. Until the ninth hour you'd think me a Scotsman. But this morning I was particularly grumpy. I'd had no wink of good sleep. I'd been trounced and rolled about and sat upon. Each several rib had its own complaint.

"Boy," I called out sourly, "if you have swine's grease and isinglass, or any kind of pilgrim's salve, mix it quick, or I'll fall apart! I squeak like a dry wheel. A dozen rogues have sat on me and jounced me up and down."

I trailed him to the kitchen, cuffing him for smirking at my lameness. We stirred the embers and set a suet on them. The cook had been awakened by the clatter and she put her head inside the door, but I told her to go about her business and mind her pans. Then I peeled my clothing and set the boy to rubbing in the grease. The boy beat my clothes while I washed. I nearly flooded the kitchen with the splash, yet it refreshed me. "And now, my pretty dear," I said, "set me out my breakfast!"

My bath had made me new. For my greater ease I lay back full length upon the settle. I was

as happy as a turtle in the sun. Part of the time I watched the brew upon the stove, and found uses for the pans and hooks that hung above me from the beams. But the cook was of a tidy figure, and most of the time I watched her ankles as she whisked about.

I've puzzled how it is that cooks, only by looking on the cover of a pot, can tell when a topmost succulence is reached. A man keeps lifting up the lid to see the bubbles at their work, and he pulls it raw off the fire. It takes a woman's fingers, too, to pinch out salt. A man tilts the can so that the food's a brine. These things lie deep in nature. There was a good cook spoiled when Jeanne d'Arc took to horse. Had she kept to her woman's task, it had been a quieter France. It was a peppery broth she stirred, and many kecked on the eating of it.

My errand at Loches was done. It was a simple errand, and I wondered why such mystery had surrounded it. It was left to conduct the Lady Diane to her masquerading brother and then I would go free.

And now, suddenly, I saw clearly what had been but glimmering the night before—the meaning of the letter that I had carried between brother

and sister. The brother was in arms against the King, a man attainted, who would be turned over, if captured, to Tristan, the King's headsman. Him I had not met. Yet the strands of his life and mine were destined to cross. A sad snarl, this. And Diane was a spy, living within sight of the Tournelles, reporting the French and English plans to Normandy and Brittany. The white rose was the House of York; and rumor had it that York was the friend of Burgundy. Of York was Edward. Had he won in battle and was he again King of England? If this were so, I had thrust myself dangerously into politics.

From my window I looked over the brown-tiled roofs of the town, and beyond, at the gray walls of the dungeon, heavily set on the hill. Even in the morning sunlight the walls were grim and terrible. I did not wish to play the game of politics. It led too certainly to the gallows.

I had seen Montfaucon, aforetime, on the Rue Saint Denis. On its gibbet, in the dusk and indistinct, I had caught a glimpse of a man's form swinging in the wind—light-footed in a hangman's galliard. Then toward me the wind blew, and again I knew the presence of this crow's meat dancer.

At this recollection—with the sweat on me—I was hot for washing my hands of the whole miserable business. If the Lady Diane had other bits of shady work, I thought, she would have to find another agent. She had written “Poor Antoine,” of her former messenger. I did not care to have it become “Poor Sarto.”

It would be an even world of work and pleasure were it not for women. Aforetime, when I was fashioning a button to surmount the Pope’s crown, I was tricked of a month by a nimble glance. And here am I on this earth’s raw edge, because, again, a woman has but grinned upon me. Would to God that Adam had been more wakeful in the night, that, so, he might have kept his rib. There would have been peace, then, upon the world.

Chrysostom voiced our general wisdom. Woman, he said, was a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a deadly fascination and a painted ill.

But Diane—I do confess me and acknowledge it—Diane has most marvelous blue eyes.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT COMES OF DRINKING FROM TOO MANY BOTTLES

THIS is a vile chapter, for I choose to tell what happened to Michel on this same night. If you are nice you may skip it. You'll not miss much, for I am not in it except at the very end.

You last saw Michel sitting in the kitchen with the cook. She had given him a plate of sugar tarts and had poured the remnant of a dozen cups of wine together. It was a sop that was mixed with red and white, but Michel has the gullet of an hostler and he sipped it like a vintage. Then she raked the embers of the fire and poked them to a blaze. Michel made room upon the settle. "Honey dear," he said, "come rest yourself!" She was not a Venus in the daytime, but in the glow she seemed to his peasant's eye a lovely vision.

In the corner of the hearth there stood a swabstick. On the shelf was a row of plates and

trenchers, serving both as memory of former feasts and as promise for the future. The roofing beams were weathered black, and all about were dripping pans, skewers, trivets, pot-hangers, and other witch's things, ready for the magic of the caldron. Here sat Michel and his fair Hecate by his side, and he was full of comfort.

Mark how the fellow brags and lies! "My pet," he said, "I was once a sailor on the seas, and was captured by Tunis pirates. Six of the villains pitched on me as I lay asleep. But did I yield? My dear, you do not know me. When the fight was done, I threw five of their bodies overboard. The captain I made my servant. Another tart, my love!" The cook's eyes were filled with admiration what God this were to find alightment here in Loches. Michel is a gaudy flash and quick to catch a woman's eye.

By my grateful belly, Sarto loves a kitchen. Of all the house, it is the heart and central warmth. The other rooms are cold suburbs round about—windy places outside the walls. Here in the kitchen I'll plant myself. I'll sniff the spices and look upon the peppers hung up to dry. Devil take my history! You'll wait for my plot. I'll roost here upon the settle and take

my ease. Outside it is a night to sway a gibbet, but it is snug upon the hearth. Outside it is a mad world, with trees pitching in the wind, and ships in danger, but the kitchen fire burns bright. Let blasts shake the hilltops, and wreckage strew the shore! I'm as peaceful as a cabbage. What do I care for Louis, or Tristan, or the Pope? My story's naught.

But it was not for me to sit in comfort. Michel was the only wooer of the wench. It was brawl that was to come my way. Above the bakeshop, as I've told you, I was to pass the night, sore hit. But Michel sat in the kitchen warmth, with his arm about the cook.

Once an hostler put in his head, and sulked that his wooing was done by proxy. The tarts and remnant of the wine were his upon a usual night. His the place upon the settle. When he turned his back, Michel stuck out his tongue. It was a stroke of humor, and the cook was set in giggles. Then I came through the kitchen, following the fellow who had shown me the clasp.

And now arose a clatter in the yard, men running. It was Maistro and his whelps starting after me. "Devil take the pother, my love!" Michel cried out. Yet he sat not down at once,

although the wench tucked her dresses beneath her snug, as invitation that he pull up close. He poked his nose out of doors, to see in the name of Satan where the din had gone.

There was running here and there, and shouts of this and that. Then the stir was hushed. Michel went back to Dame Venus of the kitchen, and, as appointed, moored alongside. This is a servant's brain. Note his want of wit! All this rummage of the stable yard had come beneath his nose, and not one whiff of truth had he sniffed in. Such a nose could be smeared in garlic and still the mouth below would murmur of the breath of roses.

Shall Sarto keep such kitchen company? Devil take my story! I stain it with such a fool. But is not writing one's adventures like eating a dinner? One's own circumstance whets the appetite and is pleasant writing. It is a choice rump upon the platter. A pretty woman, or one with spark and challenge, is a sugar pasty for a double helping. But when an untoothsome person comes within my plot, I'm loath to take him on my spoon. He's a stew that's burned. And yet for a proper meal all foods must end together. The lentils must be gone when the rump

is done. The black bread must finish with the tarts. In brief, one must eat in order, and the foods, both sour and sweet, must keep an even progress and sit as companions on the knife.

And here 's Michel, like a cup of cold stale porridge. I'll gulp him quick, and eat my pasty later.

It was a good half hour later that he dropped the wench's hand. He jumped up and jerked her head as it lay upon his shoulder. It had come to him at last that somewhere in the night outside was his master, and that the men had run off to no good purpose. It was a startled Venus that he left, for he gave no word of explanation.

He rushed headlong through the dark. All the town was quiet. As for me, I lay as I was left, and there was no wink of light to guide his steps.

Now, on these streets there was another man, and, swack, on a turn, Michel came against him. The other man, thus jolted, at first was hot with anger, and he was near to stabbing Michel. But Michel, thinking the man was myself, cried out my name. It saved his life but put things in a new pickling.

It was Tristan, the headsman of the King. Here he was, newcome from Paris, a day ahead of

the King. Of Tristan, this: He was some ten years rotted from his full maturity. If the fleas had stomachs they had leaped off him.

Tristan, when he heard my name, stayed his arm, for what should Sarto be doing here, that a running man should seek him in such a fright. Here was strange matter to be learned. So he bowed low to Michel and craved his pardon. He knew a place, close by, where wine was to be had. He took his arm and led him off, Michel still breathing hard, but wondering what golden land it was where encounter could so end.

Tristan set out wine enough to put Michel in a blather. *Messer* he called Michel, and *Monsieur*, and pried his tongue with flattery until he had him in full trot.

Michel did not know many of my plans, but he spoke all he knew: How I had pricked his sides one morning: How we had mounted horse while it was dawn: How the Lady Diane was connected with these things: How, finally, some one here in Loches was waiting for our message.

So what he wanted, Tristan got. Here was new trouble brewing for the King, and parcel of it were Sarto and Diane. It was late when Tristan left Michel, who was now on his back

beneath the table. It was so that Circe left her swine.

All day I lay at the Gray Moon, recovering from my jounce. As often as the hour came round, the cook's shoes came slapping up the steps. She spooned me bitter stuff from a leather cup. It was hard to swallow with my gullet on the level, yet by care I got not much of it on the blanket. At noon she brought up a custard. Ordinarily I esteem that whey is not man's food, yet on this occasion I found it of so pleasing a sweetness that I flung by the spoon and drained the bowl. Then I wiped my mouth on the edge of the blanket and lay back somewhat mended from my complaint.

In the afternoon I sent out Michel to inquire of the smith whether he could fit me a new blade to my hilt. By good luck the smith owned a Spanish blade, and though he was shrewd in his price, he made good work of it and returned it to me the following morning. Michel brought back word that King Louis and his Court were expected late to-night.

When at last darkness came, I saw from my window that the royal castle of Loches was lighted to its battlements. It was not lavishly set with tapers, as though Louis wished radiance for his

guests within and a show of cheer for the beggars without. But at its narrow windows, thin and haggard lights stood like prisoners in the gray of the inner walls, looking upon the free air. But from the dungeon tower no lights showed, for hope there was snuffed and dead.

And all evening I watched the castle, wondering which candle lighted Mademoiselle to bed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE POOL OF FRANCE

AND now I have written how a goldsmith came from Rome, how he met a lady and fell somewhat a victim to the glance of her blue eyes, how he went on journey for her, and now waits in Loches hot with impatience for her coming.

Of the Lady Diane again: And my story runs back to that first night in Paris when I had sheltered her upon my hearth.

Busy days are long. Have you forgotten so soon how Mademoiselle departed from me at the Palais Saint Louis, and how a king's archer followed in the dark? That night Mademoiselle dropped a stone in the still pool of France from which the waves went to the four margins. We'll watch her as she drops it, and later we shall see the waves make off.

John of Bourbon set late in Paris, playing at chess. Opposite was Sir Gilles, pulling at his hangnails with his teeth, as he waited for his turn. Bourbon put his slim white fingers on the roc, then squinted close upon the board. "I check

your rey," he said. Gilles's claw hung above like a hawk before it strikes. "Not so, my lord. I meet it with a chivaler." He went back to his feast upon his fingers.

Bourbon and Gilles both deserve a word. Of Bourbon first. He was John, the second of the name, and by hereditary right he held as appanage broad lands to the south of Paris, of which the central province was the Bourbonnais. Friend of the King, foe of the King, as occasion served. He had fought the old king, Charles, in the uprising known as the Praguerie, now some thirty years gone. Also he had fought the old king's son, this present Louis, in the war of the Common Weal. But he had schemed with him too, cheek to cheek, when advantage lay that way. They were then dear cousins to each other, with interchange of gifts upon a holiday. When snug at home, Bourbon lived at Orleans or at Bourges or perhaps at Moulins, for he had at all these places, castles of uncommon strength, as had been tested by force of arms. Yet now he sits in Paris. He thinks it safer in these dizzy times to keep a glance on Louis. As for his age, it was hard on seventy, for his white hair hung shaggy on his head and chin.

Of Gilles next. He was a fox, whom nature had fashioned outwardly as a man. For thirty years he has served Philip of Burgundy and his son Charles, and he is now upon that business. No matter what the pretext that he gives for being here in Paris, you may be sure to what end he works. You'll observe how his long nose comes forward in the taper's light! The nostrils quiver like those of an animal that lies in wait.

And Mademoiselle came from the night and stood beside John of Bourbon's chair.

"Duke John," she said, and waited below the sconce, so that the light fell on her face.

"Ha, chick, my dear," he cried, and he held out both his hands to her, "what brings you here at such an hour of night?"

"My lord,"—but her look fell on Gilles, who had propped his upper teeth against his thumb, and sat with mouth open and drooping eyes, impatient at the delay. He had the better of the Duke by two pouns and a chivaler, and so he scowled at the interruption.

Bourbon caught Mademoiselle's glance. "Gilles," he said, and wagged his thumb across his shoulder. Gilles needed but the hint. He went off softly, with his skirts closely about him.

Then Mademoiselle spoke simply as befits a weighty message. "Edward reigns in England."

"By Grace of God," Bourbon cried, and came upon his feet, scattering the chess men.

"Duke John," she asked, "is it well for us?"

"It is well, my child."

"And on the road—it was at Rouen where we passed the night—a man came to meet us from Duke Francis of Brittany. To him also I gave the message. Is it well, my lord?"

"Ay, it is." Then he stood pondering, pulling his white beard through his fingers.

"What comes of this, Duke John?" she asked.

"Some say," he answered, "that we verge toward another Common Weal." On a sudden he cried out. "Gilles, Gilles!"

Gilles came at a trot, lifting his eyebrows when he saw how the chess board was overturned. "Gilles!" Duke John cried out. "Here's news. Edward reigns in England."

"So?" Gilles answered. "Then, by the grace of heaven, we may leave these silly puppets where they lie and consult on worthier things."

Duke John laid his open palm upon the table. "It's so we stand," he said. "Burgundy, me-thinks, is this long thin finger in the middle.

Bourbon is the finger next to it. Brittany is the other side. Aragon is the little finger." He wiggled each in turn. "Of these we're sure. But the thumb—ha, Sir Gilles—the thumb is Guienne. See how it lies apart from us! If we could but fold it in our palm. So! And bring these fingers tight against it—then, 'fore God, we could strike a blow for France."

Bourbon lifted his fist at arm's length above him, and struck it against the table. "It's so we'd strike."

It was thus that Mademoiselle dropped a stone into the pool of France. Now we shall see the waves go circling off.

The first wave—without Diane's intention—splashed upon Louis. He sat sulking, this same night, on a map of France, with fingers chiefly on the parts that lie to the north and east. Now a hunger had come on him as he worked, and to ease it he laid out before him divers pasties. These he was breaking in his fingers and was thrusting them in his mouth, sprinkling his map with crumbs.

Louis put his thumb on Ghent. "It's here," he mused, "that Burgundy sits—and his precious daughter Marie, for whom my brother Charles is

sighing. Love, I'm told, comes hottest in the spring. Therefore, until the season's past, I'll bait the hook with a Spanish flirtation. I must provide him this amusement, for the Burgundian marriage would wreck me. If I can hold him a bachelor until the autumn, the season will help to cool him."

He finished his thoughts, then brushed off the crumbs vindictively as though they were the armies of Burgundy. He blew them beyond the Rhine, horse and foot.

To him, as he was thus employed, there came the archer who had followed after Mademoiselle. Louis brayed when he saw him. "Patch," he cried, "you break up my meditation." But he smiled when he saw how the fellow was smirched. "There's mud on you. It speaks of haste," he said.

"Mademoiselle Diane has returned to Paris."

"Well, Louis cares not. He's not a lover of the lady. It's Oliver will fee you for the news."

"And she passed an hour with this new Italian, Luca Sarto."

"Still Louis cares not. Her conduct is for her priest."

"Then, sire, she went to John of Bourbon."

"Ha, is it so?" Louis squinted and made a mouth. "When was this? To-night?"

"It 's but a half hour since."

"And then?"

"Nothing, sire."

Louis's palm nursed his cheek, then his head went down in thought. His eyes became narrow slits, like the iris of a cat's eye when it comes into the light. Louis was himself coming into the light. He waved the archer off, then chewed his upper lip. "I may be starting on a shadow," he muttered. He smoothed the map and stared on it. "Mademoiselle goes to Boulogne. So I am informed. It 's but a finger length across the channel. Burgundy's wife is English, sister of this ambitious Edward. But Sarto is a Roman. And last comes Bourbon." He hummed a broken song, as measure to his thoughts.

He scowled and brooded on these things, then fell to whining on another tune: How his sleep was broken: How he rose dizzy in the morning. "By the Holy Blood," was how he ended, "if the Madonna of Saint Ours would come to life and heal me, I 'd whip Bourbon and Burgundy, both of them, out of France."

He sneezed, but staunched himself upon his sleeve. The water splashed from the pool of France must have wet his feet.

Let 's leave him here, sniffing on his complaints, and see how the other waves came to shore!

I have told you that the horseman who kissed Diane's fingers on the landing of Jocelyn's inn at Rouen, went riding to the west. He sweated all the way to Rennes. Mountain and lowland, day and night, and here was Brittany at last. Rennes is the capital, and it measures to the dignity of the dukedom. The horseman arrived in the morning, and his horse drooped in the courtyard. "What ho!" the man called out. "Where shall I find my Lord Francis of Brittany?"

Francis of Brittany had risen for the mass, and now he came forth from sacrament. There was a blare of gay voices in his company, for it was to be a day of hunting. "My lord," cried one of them, as they came down the steps, "here is a man who bears a message for you."

"From where?"

"From England, so he says."

"So! Move off a bit! I'll see him here."

In this slight privacy the messenger gave his news.

Francis tossed his cap. Then he sobered. "To stall!" he called. "The hunt has been broken up. Yet I'll give you sport to-morrow. There is an old gray fox in Paris we'll run to hole. Hear my news, gentlemen! Edward has come to the English throne. It is the signal for revolt in France." Whereat he rode by himself out of the clamor.

He sat with his counselors in a smudge of talk. It was two hours at the least, but you will hear only the end of it. "Sire," said one in conclusion, "we'll front ourselves with Charles of Guienne. It will win the opinions of all France if our cause is topped by the brother of the King." Many words before! These are enough.

Bordeaux is the capital of Guienne. It is off a bit, but Sir Gilles has already started, primed for argument. This had been compacted between him and Bourbon before the dawn. Gilles spoke not only for his master, Charles of Burgundy, but for Bourbon as well: And now for Brittany also.

This Charles of Guienne, whose name and help Burgundy, Bourbon, and Brittany now sought, was a smallish youth who had a pipe by way of throat, suited rather to canzonet than the call of battle. It was in moonlight and at a lady's window that

it was pitched the best. His face was white, and his chin would have still been smooth if the razor had idled for a week. He was also thin of chest and shank. Nature, some twenty years since in the making of him, had cheated him of the rougher fibers. Had she been setting up a scholard, she could not have pinched him more. Yet mark his rank! Charles, Duke of Berry, Count of Angoulême, sometime Duke of Normandy—while the King's favor lasted—and now, as a sop from this same king, he is Duke of Guienne. Lastly, this Charles is a brother of the King—next in line to be king himself, until the Dauphin had been born. He sulked at the *Te Deum* in Notre Dame when the royal infant was baptized. Also, if his own desire be the parent of the future, Charles is to be the husband of Marie of Burgundy. Thus lay his intent. It was not so much to take the lady to wife, as that he might ally himself with the house of Burgundy. Guienne and Burgundy, so conjoined, he thought, could shake the universe. Yet the jiggling of the planets would have been slight, if Burgundy had laid off the job.

Sir Gilles came from Paris and, stained as he was, he sought the palace.

"Sire," he blurted to Charles of Guienne when he stood before him. "Sire, this north wind brings good news. Your friends are agreed to set you on the throne of France. We'll brush this spider off." For so he had fashioned his message.

But Charles held out, and whined that the times were disjointed for the undertaking. For this lordling was hot and cold, feverish in preparation, yet too chilly to draw the sword. Sir Gilles met him with large phrases. "The sun, the moon, the stars were dimmed for a proper sovereign," and other celestial foolery. Charles brightened on the words and stroked his silk mustache, but withheld consent.

Sir Gilles took a turn around the room, tapping his cane upon the stones. "My lord," he said, "you force me to play my ace." He paused, and then, "My Lord Duke of Burgundy's daughter, the Princess Marie, is now come to the age of marriage."

"Ha, so?" This from Guienne, but the fire showed at last in the smudge.

"It's so, indeed," said Gilles, "and the Duke looks all about for a proper husband for his daughter."

Guienne cocked his ear upon the words. Gilles continued. "But the Lady Marie is nice. She'll not have herself set up for highest bidding. Ah me, youth goes to youth."

"Ay, it does," Guienne answered. He sighed and rolled his eyes up ceilingward.

It was Gilles's turn again. "My lord," he said, "I'll not mince it. The Princess shows some favor to yourself. Of course, it's not beyond what is proper to a maiden."

In such fashion did Gilles set himself to fan the blaze.

It was in the dawn that Charles of Guienne gave his consent to rise against the King. Yet chiefly his thoughts ran how by this he might take Marie to wife.

Sir Gilles cooled himself outside, for it had been hot work and he had wracked himself for compliment and trope. There was a pale light of day upon the city, but a scud of cloud lay along the horizon. Gilles saw it and smiled. "The wind from the north," he muttered, "fetches us a storm."

And did a wave cross the pool to Burgundy? You know not the man, to think he had been sleeping. These four days he had been dropping

pebbles of his own, wherefrom the ripples by now swept in a wide circumference. "Charles, Duke of Burgundy, of Brabant, of Limburg, and of Luxemburg; Count of Flanders, of Artois, of Burgundy, of Hainault, of Holland, of Zeeland, and of Namur; Marquis of the Holy Empire; Lord of Friesland, of Malines. . . ." So had he been proclaimed when Philip, the old Duke, died.

But a wave from Diane's stone did wash south until it lapped the Pyrenees. Sir Gilles was not needed there, for Aragon was apt for revolt, fretted by an old discontent.

So it was that in May of the year fourteen hundred and seventy-one, the pool of France was stirred. To change the figure, the thumb at last lay curled inside the fingers to strike a blow at Louis.

Now mark what happened further!

Charles of Guienne gave his consent at dawn. On the night that followed a beacon flared from the roof of the Cathedral of Rennes. The fire lay in the gutter to the east and north, and three men brought the faggots up the stairs to feed it.

Such country folk near by as watered their cattle after dark saw the flame and afterwards they made of it a family riddle around the candle.

But those who lived farther off on the road to Fougères and on the highlands beyond, saw it also and thought it to be a planet hanging on Leo's tail. These sucked astrology from it and wondered what is boded. Perhaps, they thought, these lights were somehow compounded with the comet in the east.

And other flames followed across the hills from top to top, as though the older gods were once more being worshiped in the night. Before the dawn set in, the flaming signal had gone beyond Alençon so that the breakfast curds as far to the east as Mortagne had rumor and gossip for their sauce.

And all this night Duke Charles of Guienne chewed at his lips and twitched his toes in nervousness, but feared to sleep. Louis's face, he thought, would have appeared to him through the curtains of his bed. Gilles's eye was on him, for the fox sat by lest he repent of his decision. In the morning Charles soused the redness from his eyes and swore brave oaths upon his sword. Gilles saw him at it, and grinned and went his ways.

And from the court of Aragon thirty men on horseback took out the word, and blew it forth

upon their shouts until the valleys woke and prattled of it. Harness was buffed that day, and pikes were tipped.

But Charles of Burgundy foamed all night, and chattered of arms and war. In the morning he sent extra posts to Lille and Louvain and as far south as Arras.

And when, think you, was this rummage—this smudge of fire and outcry—blown to Louis?

From Évreux, when darkness was still thick, a horseman of King Louis went riding to the east. Such was the murk and such was his speed that you would have said he was not of God's creation, but was got by the devil out of darkness. Speed, thou galloping toe of Satan! The Majesty of France has need of the word you bring.

These fires were of a Sunday night. It was Monday in the dawn that the King's horseman rode from Évreux. It was Monday in the dusk of evening that the horseman splashed in the mud of Paris. The towers of the palace hung over him. "By the blood of Christ," he bawled, "lead me to the King."

But they mocked him for his sweat. Louis was already two days on the road to Loches.

CHAPTER XXII

MAGGOTS OF THE BRAIN

THERE are many maggots of the brain, but chief of them are fear and hate.

I choose now to write of Louis's journey to Loches. Only a brief account is needed. We shall see royalty jouncing on a mule.

Louis was in distemper all the way, whining first on his disease, then grumbling against his cousin Charles of Burgundy, who, "by Holy Mary," so he said, "fretted him worse than ever haircloth did a saint."

Many of his lords and men went with him, and rode mules also. Nearest to the King always was Olivier le Daim, with a grin and whisper between them. Olivier does not come within the scope of my book, yet he so sits in the spotted sunlight of royalty that he merits a word. He was the King's barber, a fellow who being at first privy to his beard, had come at last to be privy to his counsels. He bore before him on his mule the strops and razors of his craft, and also a lesser case for

the lozenges and oils he ministered to the King when his illness came on him—a fellow with a soapy smell upon his fingers. When the time comes round for spooning out his nostrums, Olivier solemnly drops his jaw. “Sire,” he says, “my wisdom tells me that you may have the stone. If so, here’s lotion to allay it.” Or again: “Your Majesty must guard yourself against the heat. Here are red juniper berries—*graines de genièvres rouges*—to mend you.” Or the ring of Saint Zanolobius was offered, and the blood of Cape Verde turtles. Thus, the farce.

As for the rest of the traveling company, they sorted as they might—fifty of them at least, with many servants in the dust behind.

They were beyond Versailles, when it was seen that Duke John of Bourbon was not in his accustomed place, which was off the rump of Louis’s mule. Louis himself sobered when he noticed this, but waved off the thought. “Duke John,” he said, “sent word that he was of a sudden ill. He’ll join us at Loches.” Louis said this twice, so that those near him might hear. But he took to whispering with Olivier, with his hand before his mouth.

They lay at Chartres in accommodation near the

Cathedral. It was a common inn, but swept clean forward of the kitchen door. The rooms and passages were sprinkled with scent as prevention against the plague for they say it first lodges in the nose. Sweet scent cast in sinks and privies wards off the plague better than the killing of a hundred Jews.

All evening Louis praised the liquor and made a crony of the tapster but emptied his pot half tasted when the fellow's back was turned.

"My dear gossip," said the King, "have you not a bit of the holy cross in the cathedral here?"

"Ay, sire, we have."

Louis fumbled at his poke and pinched out three copper coins. These he weighed in his palm, but tossed back two of them. "Take this, my friend," he said. "Commend me to the priests. Bid them pray for me." Then he added: "Your wine is of a sunny vintage. My cup is thirsty."

At bedtime he put his nose at the door for air. A clear wind blew off the hills. "Olivier!" he called, and his face clouded. "See! There's a comet in the sky."

But Olivier had comfort. "*Vir sapiens*—a wise man," he said, "is master of the stars."

Then as Louis still fretted, he added shrewdly: "Look, sire! The comet hangs in the east. It points disaster to Burgundy."

Louis slammed the door and shuffled off to bed.

The Lady Diane waited on the Queen that night and handed her the sleeping robe. And it seems that the Queen was much distressed. She wrung her hands when Diane wished her good night. "Mistress Diane," she said, "bad times. The King fears them." And Diane, knowing about the fires on the Norman hills and what they boded, held her peace. But the Queen's kiss burned her cheek. While the redness was still upon her face, the Queen held her by the wrist and gazed at her. At this there was much fear in Diane, and coming down from the Queen's apartments she steadied herself against the rail.

It was at Chartres, too, that there came to the King a legate from the Pope. And to one who peeped upon the document over the King's hunched back there would have been seen in flourished letters the name of Luca Sarto—an ominous message, for the Pope had been moved by the Orsini to summon Sarto home for punishment. The Orsini, it appeared, distrusted Maistro's accomplishment. They were making sureness doubly so.

Now Louis would by preference have offended one of his lead saints rather than the Pope. In consequence, he feigned to be aghast at Sarto's misdemeanors and dismissed the legate with the assurance that Luca Sarto would be arrested and sent to Rome.

Then he pondered by himself. It could be done by indirection. First Sarto should be flattered—as a device for future favors with Rovere, if Pope Paul died and Rovere succeeded him in the office. Yet Paul's letter assured Louis of his health and strength. It was this lie that turned Louis to his decision, for he thought it better to gain a present favor than to play upon the future. All of which Pope Paul knew when he wrote, for he lied, being at the time in a sore state and near his end.

Sarto's arrest might be worked by stealth; might be made in Italy even, where, with the trappings of pretended honor, he could be sent on embassy, and so betrayed, and no King's hand showing. And so events might proceed so that all would be accomplished and good-will gained on both sides. And this would be needful, for who could know how the papal coin might fall? Would it not induce quiet sleep within the royal nightcap, if

on both sides the tossed-up coin were heads?

But Louis planned too soon. It was a foolish hunter who sold the bear-skin before he had killed the bear.

Then Louis concluded his reply. "And might the saints," so ran the letter, "protect his holiness from the guile of his enemies, and spare him long for the glory of Christendom." To which was set the crabbed signature of Louis of Valois.

And, mark you, all of these schemes against me are to be in his head when I shall see him next. Yet, when that time comes, he 'll smirk on me, and I'll know naught of the deviltry inside him. Had I passed a month with Father Paul, and sat by him as he pruned his hedges, I had known better the way of spiders. "They spin in the dark," he said, "and lay their snares across the thoroughfares of night."

Of meaner matters, this—which also concerns Sarto. You will recall the servant woman, Jeanne, who put her waxy ear to Diane's door, when she and Sarto planned the trip to Melun. For two days she had been itching with the secret. And now at last—for she traveled with the Court as a tire woman—she found occasion to limp to Louis. He had just dismissed the papal legate.

Jeanne stood in the hallway, blowing with excitement. Louis frowned when she entered, pulling his legs inside the covers, for he still lay a-bed. She blurted her secret to him, how Sarto had gone off on Diane's bidding, and also how Oliver de Bourges was stirred when he heard of it. But she told the story with more detail, as a king's gold would weigh more heavily in the palm. She stood in the doorway, twisting her lean fingers in her skirt.

You may be sure that Louis's love for Sarto and Diane did not increase when he learned the things they had practiced beneath his nose. Yet he was in no suspicion that in this secret commerce there was a larger danger to himself. He knew nothing as yet of the flames of Normandy. For wry winds upon the Channel held back the news from England. However, in the actions of Mademoiselle there was always food for thought. There had been already a stew in the King's brain that morning. Perhaps Jeanne added a pinch of pepper to it.

After Jeanne was gone, Olivier entered with a fresh-aired shift. The King muttered. "Olivier, there's trouble breeding in our realm." Then when the shift was on him: "If my

brother Charles be concerned, I'll take him by the gizzard and twist him until he bawls for peace." Louis bit his nails and spat them on the floor. Then, when the water was hot, he held his cheek sidewise to be soaped and scraped.

It was at night as they neared Vendôme that Louis first saw a smudge of light in the west—the fires, maybe, that burned above Le Gault. It was a dim blur, as though nature, having squandered her pigments in the sunset, grudged now a further cost. A pale light hung above the trees. Louis, at the sight of it, turned sidewise on his mule until the beast stopped and fell to nibbling at the grass. Olivier was close, as usual. "Sire," he said, "the hills to-night are strangely candled."

Louis turned on him. "Do you think?—" he whined, but broke off. Then he spoke in Olivier's ear, but aloud so that all heard. "It's likely that Burgundy sets the taper. We'll singe his beard with it, before it burns to socket." Then he sat with his eyes intent upon the light. "Pest," he said. "I've taken a grievous time for pilgrimage. Blessed Mary, be gracious to thy servant and show thy mercy!" After which he kicked his mule and hurried on—his cap spread before him on the horn of the saddle, with its saints to com-

fort him. And the light burned an hour upon the hills and went out.

They stopped for the night at Vendôme. After dinner Louis found Diane alone. "Mademoiselle," he said, "a word with you." He took her fingers and bent his stiff old back until he kissed them. "Diane," he said, "Oliver de Bourges was killed in Paris the night before we left. Has the rumor reached you?"

"Ay, sire, it has."

"On the steps of the Palais Saint Louis," he added. Louis squinted at her closely. "Sarto, it's said, was missing in the morning."

Diane shivered but kept silent. The King took her by the wrist. "This Italian killed Oliver."

"Sire," Diane answered, "I cannot believe it."

"So?" said Louis. "On what persuasion?"

Diane paused. Louis prodded for an answer. "Come, lady, Sarto is a gallant fellow. I would gladly be persuaded. The evidence against him is hot. If you know aught to cool it, you'll speak."

"Sire," said Diane, "Monsieur Sarto was not that night in Paris."

"So? What was Sarto's errand out of Paris?"

Louis took her fingers. "Why, look you, Mademoiselle, how you tremble!" Then a sly expres-

sion came on his face. "Be of comfort, lady! We'll find a way to clear Sarto of the charge." He went off abruptly, humming a tune.

They lay the next night at Plessis-lez-Tours. It was the farthest they had traveled in a day. It was easily seen that the King chafed for speed, for at noon he bolted his food, and called the others from their tables before they had hardly got their fingers on their meats. One of the lords who rode at the tail of the procession whispered to Diane as he sucked a bone of a fowl, "The candle on the hills that lighted the King to bed last night threw bad shadows on his dreams." Diane made no reply. She had had bad dreams herself, as a consequence of the King's talk with her.

Plessis-lez-Tours is a royal seat much favored by the King. It lies on the edge of the city of Tours and is a considerable park. They were advancing through this with such speed as was left in the mules and had already spied the turrets of the castle, when Louis reined in. "Fellow," he called. An archer who stood alongside the road came up. "How goes our remedy for poaching?" the King asked. "Does the evil abate?"

The archer waved his hand toward the dusk of the trees, and smirked as he answered. "Your

Majesty," he said, "we've hanged as many as forty of the varlets. Did the wind come out of the north—" He made a sour face and stopped. "There, sire, is one of them, hanging from that oak—as thieving a rascal as ever poached his dinner."

It had been a hard day, and the King grunted with stiffness as they helped him off his mule. All fell to bed when supper had been eaten.

The Lady Diane waited on the Queen as usual. When she had set the light and had laid a breviary on the stand—for the Queen sleeps ill and reads at night—she hung the royal garments at the window. Then she stopped with the other ladies at the foot of the bed if perhaps the Queen had a last word. The Queen dismissed the others, but retained Diane. She bade her bring a stool alongside the bed. Then she lifted herself on her elbow and listened until the footsteps of the others died away.

"Diane," she said at length, "the King mistrusts you. Peace until I finish. For myself, I do not know whether you be compacted with our enemies, but I love you, dearie, and I would not see harm come to you. Therefore I bid you to be gone from our Court!" She kissed Diane on the

forehead. Then as Diane was about to speak, she interrupted her: "Before we depart from Loches for Paris, you must leave us. When that time comes I shall provide you safe conduct. In the meantime, you'll scheme as little wickedness toward us as you may."

Diane tried to answer, but the Queen was firm in dismissing her. Diane felt her way along the hall and down the stairs. But when in bed, she stared upon the darkness until the third hour.

The branches scratched against the wall and the wind moaned in the forest.

When she found that she could not sleep, she came from her bed and sat upon the stone seat at the window. The sky was blurred, and rain fell in her face. And as the night was, so was her heart. And presently in her distress, Diane held out her arms to the darkness. "Jacques, Jacques," she whispered, "I've need of thee, my brother. My heart is lonely. Come to me, Jacques, and take me with you!"

Then she sat quiet and almost content, with her arms extended on the casement, her palms open to the rain, as though Jacques were somewhere in the darkness and he had heard her prayer.

But toward morning—earlier than the first

streak of it—the wind shifted, twisting and breaking the clouds. An old moon, ragged like a beggar, threw a tattered light across the park.

Diane's head had fallen on her hands, but the light roused her. Moonlight was chasing the shadows across the lawn. It touched with silver the edge of the grove beyond. It climbed slowly up the trunks of the trees. It lighted their branches to the top.

But Diane sat frozen at what she saw. From a tree a poacher's body hung, dangling and tossing in the wind. Now the branch sagged until the toes came almost to the ground, and seemed to stretch to feel it. Then the branch sprang up and spun the body round.

Diane did not cry aloud. But she drew her arm across her eyes and tottered from the window. She threw herself face down upon her bed and lay shivering. She tried to weep but could only moan brokenly. For it seemed to her that the body was the body of Jacques, caught in an act of treason, that it was thus he had come to her, to bear her off. For had she not held out her arms to the night for him, and the wind had seemed to answer? Yet the wind had mocked her.

When at last the light of day came, she slept.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE SMUDGE WAS BLOWN TO LOUIS

THE next day the King was closeted until noon with his council on news that came from England. For at last Louis had heard that Henry VI was dead in the Tower of London and that Edward had been again proclaimed king—Burgundy's Edward, whose very armies had drawn their pay from him. For a new insurrection in France, this might be the signal. Burgundy was already in arms, but Guienne was waspish and disaffected. And had not the Duke of Aragon long been casting eyes on Roussillon? If this proved to be the blossom time for general revolt, the saying held that weeds on their burgeoning are shallow rooted. And thus the very wisdom of the streets advised instancy. "My garden grows foul with briars," Louis had brayed when he broke the meeting up. "This brother of mine—this sprout, this stem, this weed that runs so full of sap, chokes the fair lily of our France. By God, I'll break him at the root."

It was past midday when they took the road to Loches. And Diane went with them fearfully.

Toward night they came up the hill through the town of Loches. Louis, who rode ahead, turned in his saddle and craned his neck until he saw Diane. Then he called to her over the heads of those who were between. "Mademoiselle, methinks you have never seen our pretty castle. Yonder is a tower of it."

Now the tower to which he pointed was the great dungeon. And when he had spoken, he sat twisted on his mule, with his knuckles supporting him against the creature's back. "Go long, you pig!" he said, as the animal stopped. And then: "What think you of it, Mademoiselle? Is it not a pretty building?"

Diane could say no more than, "Ay, it is," but she brooded afterwards on what the King had meant, for Louis was not a lady's man to trick words idly.

It was the journey's end. All sought their rooms in the castle.

Mademoiselle tells me that she had scarcely bathed and smocked herself when her serving varlets brought in her chest of clothes. With them came her tire woman, a pert wench whose name

was Marie. The varlets had offered to flirt with her upon the stairs, but she had snubbed them, for she had a lover in the guard. She bade them loosen the straps of the chest. Then she laid out Mademoiselle's garments, shaking and smoothing them.

Mademoiselle's choice fell on a blue garment. It was contrived to the figure, but flared out below the waist. Sarto's no sempstress, so he'll not describe it. Marie by going round about snapped on the buttons and the hooks that made it fast. Then she stood off. "It's marvelous sweet," she said, but she crossed herself. "In this blue gown, Mademoiselle, you are like the blessed Madonna herself."

Diane took up the candle to light her in the hall. Its light fell again across her face.

Marie looked at her and gave a little cry. "Ah, lady," she said, "the Madonna is not more beautiful."

Diane wondered at her, but as dinner pressed she left her.

Diane met the Queen upon the stairs, and they sought the hall together. "You are attired in blue, to-night. It's a color the King much admires." This from the Queen.

Louis dined alone.

With his knife he traced the plan of Beauvais upon the cloth and set the pepperpot to be the citadel. The river's here, he said. He laid a spoon to mark it, then fell to scheming for the town's defence.

But presently he sneezed, drenching the citadel with wind and rain. Olivier came at a trot. "Sire," he said, "a murk comes off the river. It's vile in the blood. You must put your legs to-night in mustard water." Louis cried "Pish!" But Olivier was firm. He sat nodding for a minute on Louis's tongue, then stirred a fiery salve and sent him off to bed.

Beauvais was abandoned to his enemies.

The following morning the King awakened cured but in ill humor. A servant brought to him a basin of water for washing and drew aside the window hanging, whereat the King squinted in the light. He drew himself to a sitting posture on his four-post bed and wrapped the covering close about him. Miserable and poor, the king, with the searching light across his tumbled bed, his thin hands holding the clothing to his throat and his shoulders drawn forward by the chill.

For his breakfast, which was brought on pewter

service, he had little appetite, and he poked his food with his fingers. *Dio*, this King with his fingers poked his food. When these became wet and sticky, he wiped them on his nightcap, which by its looks had served a week of breakfasts. Meantime the thoughts that chased across his brain were unpleasant, and they left on his face the furrows of their evil course.

“François!” he called.

A fellow who was bearing off the ewer stopped and turned.

“François, Tristan waits without. Bid him enter.” Louis moved the bolster at his back and squirmed until he found comfort. His sharp knees brought the blanket to a point.

Tristan entered and fumbled with his cap before the door. He was a shabby fellow with a dirty cloak thrown about his shoulders and with stable dung clinging to his feet. He was thin-thatched a-top, and no bat, however blind, would have tried to go a-nesting there. His face was ugly, all crease and seam, with a drunkard’s nose smoldering in its midst. If his red nose had been set at the window of a tavern, it would have served as a beacon for lost travelers. Or it would have admirably furnished the swinging board be-

fore the door, seeming to speak thus: "Good sirs, here is the sign of the fiery nose. There's strong drink inside."

This was Tristan, sketched to life, the headsmen of the King. I do pray me to God that I live to pay him for his dirty attentions to me, soon to come.

"Tristan," the King began. The fellow shifted to the other leg. "Tristan, you bore me news last night that you had traced Jacques Motier to his place of hiding on the Montrichard road."

"It was quite by chance, sire. I had just come from pumping a servant of Luca Sarto dry, when by good luck—and luck it was—whom should I see but Jacques Motier. So I followed him."

Tristan was prepared to run on. Somewhat slighting the King had been on past occasions, but now would be amends. He would again be "dear friend Tristan." He had favors to ask. With Jacques trapped in his hiding, the King would be in a giving mood.

But Louis broke him short. "Peace, Tristan. I've got the tale by heart already. Listen to me! Tristan, I now bid you to arrest this Motier and to bring him to me here at Loches. God's

love, old crony, I 'd like to go for him myself. It will be sport for you. And you will put him in the empty dungeon below Balue's cage. Then come and tell me, Tristan, whether it be day or night."

Tristan grinned. Here was a promise of a golden dawn. "Sire," he said, "methinks there will be work for me anon. I grow rusty for want of practice."

"It's likely enough, my dear headsman, but wait the event. We'll fill the tub with water when the rat is inside our trap."

He waved Tristan off, then called him back.

"Tristan," he said, "my dearest friend, I've heard it was a brave mouse that nested in a cat's ear. Luca Sarto sleeps at the Gray Moon. You may pick him up as you go along. I'll make a mouthful of the pretty creature."

Tristan rubbed his hands with pleasure, then backed himself to the door and out. There was one smell the less within the room.

And now there was a noise in the hall outside. The servant François thrust in his head, eager with news.

"Your Majesty, here's a horseman says he must see you on the instant."

This horseman was the same whom we saw but two days since at the gate of the Tournelles, newly arrived from Brittany, bawling for the King. And now at last he told his message. "Sire," he began, "Brittany is in arms." And so rattled to the end—how there were flames upon the hills, and how the villages from Rennes to Rouen were stirred. But he got no further, for Louis kicked off the sheet and thrust out his legs.

"François," he cried. "Fetch in my gear! There's man's work to-day. Ha, François, boy, you'll help me with this shift. I'll take Burgundy by the nose to-day. Bring in my boots!" And so on, until he was dressed. And then: "Bid my lords come in!"

He ranged about the room until all his lords were set.

Louis was in high glee now, and he roared upon them what plans lay to his purpose. Meanwhile a secretary sat upon a stool. The fellow had no time for nibbling at his quill, for Louis kept him scratching. When all was done, the secretary read out the proclamation that Louis had composed. The lords nodded their approval. The paper ran to many words. I'll give but the kernel of it.

“Be it proclaimed in Paris, Orleans, Tours, and in such other cities as We shall designate, that We, Louis by the grace of God, King of France, in our mercy for our people and in recognition of our duty to hold our realm inviolate—do order the mayors of these cities forthwith to summon all nobles and not nobles, holding any lands by homage or fealty to the Crown, to be ready in arms on the first day of June following, on pain of imprisonment and confiscation of goods. By these same letters patent all officers of Ourselves are forbidden to admit of any excuse or certificate from any persons whatsoever holding lands or tenures by homage or fealty of the Crown; and that whosoever shall refuse to obey the summons shall be looked upon as enemies to Us, and be punished as rebels and traitors to their country.”

Louis twitched with impatience until the secretary had read it through. Then he cried out. “Ha, my lords, methinks this Charles of Burgundy has worn too long Edward’s garter on his leg. With your help I’ll pluck it off. As for my brother Charles, God’s word, I’ll take him by the nose, until he bawls for mercy.” Then he broke up the meeting and packed them off.

You think, perhaps, that Sarto is no better than

a chronicler, a rascal who is always peeping in at holes and cudgeling his invention to find matter for his gossip. Here, you think, he pretends to have seen the King without his shift, that common folk will marvel at his closeness to the great. If you do think that Sarto brags, you do him injustice. I tell these things as they happened, with word of witnesses.

Then the King's gleeful mood fell sour. Fear pinched him, and disease.

Here had he come to Loches to pray to the Virgin to help him to mend his health. Even though war was in the field, it was well to take occasion to kneel to her. He could squeeze the time between his appointments and urge the Virgin to be spry. If she could mend him from the stone, it would be the worse for Burgundy.

And who could tell when the miracle might happen that had been foretold? Who could say when the Madonna might come to life and make him whole by the touch of her blessed hands?

So Louis rose and washed himself and sought the church of the Madonna of Saint Ours.

These events happened on the first morning after his arrival in Loches.

CHAPTER XXIV

I AM ASSAILED BY THE LITTLE PINK GOD

ON this same morning I set out from the Gray Moon inn, where I had been housed on the previous day, to find Mademoiselle.

But first I rubbed the smouches off my old brown doublet and set a gay primrose on my front. The chemist had sweet scent of a sharp and pleasant odor. I bought an ounce. My shift was in its second week, so I soused it.

I stopped for my sword. Thinking it might advantage the smith among his customers to know for whom he had done the work—the armorers of Milan would have boasted of it—I gave him my name. But the fool wiped his nose along his arm and knew not of me.

“I’m told,” I said, “that there was a brawl on the streets two nights ago.”

The smith paused with uplifted hammer. “The rogues got their just pay to an even centime,” he said. “They set on an honest stranger who had passed his evening in the inn. There were witnesses that he fought in self-defense.”

I passed on, eased of the fear that Maistro's death might plague me.

The town runs up hill. On top stands the sullen castle. I was admitted without parley.

At the end of a winding ascent the road sheered to the dungeons, but at the turn there was an opening in the wall. A garden lay inside with the Collegiate Church of Saint Ours beyond the trees. Inquiry had told me that Mademoiselle would be at service, so I turned in.

The garden sits on the brow of a pleasant hill above the sunny valley of the Indre. Cattle fed across the sleepy meadows and gathered in the shadow. White-legged washerwomen, far distant, soaped their linen and scrubbed them on the stones in the shallow stream. Their cries and friendly chatter came upward in the wind. I marked the progress, also, of a donkey driver, far below me on the road, whose song—"L'Amour de Moi," for I knew its tune—came to me now and then as the breeze shifted.

The *De Profundis Clamavi* had ceased by the time I reached the door of the church, and there was a sound of movement within. The service was at an end.

As I wished to meet the Lady Diane privately,

I went aside about an hundred paces, where I could see her when she came out. Presently she appeared at the church door, nodding to her acquaintance. She was clad in usual blue with a jeweled cap on her head. Her beauty out-topped my recollection. It had increased, like usury, its sum and total. She needed neither firelight nor candle. Her hair was yellow like ripe straw and was gathered in a gold mesh set with turquoise.

She caught my eye at once and started in some fright. Then of a sudden, leaving her companions, she turned into the shrubbery toward the palace buildings. When she had gone a minute's distance I followed after her. "Mademoiselle Diane!" I called, when I had come close.

She turned at the sound. "What does Luca Sarto here? I pray you do not bring bad news."

"Your brother sends word that he prospers."

"Mary be praised!" she replied. Then fear came on her face. "My brother?" she asked. "What do you know of him? I sent you to find Jacques Bonnet."

"It's so you did, dear lady. But you put too low a value on Sarto's wit. Your brother is here in Loches."

"In Loches," she repeated in despair. "He is

not in the castle? He is not in the dungeons?"

"No, no, Mademoiselle. Your brother is free."

She sighed with relief. "And does he bid me to come to him?"

"To-night, Mademoiselle."

"Then God be praised."

"Mademoiselle," I said, "this place is public. If we may seek a spot off the path, I'll tell you these things from the start."

We went through the taller grasses, Diane in front, and came upon a bench that was screened by shrubbery. "Know then—" I began, and told her all. "And so," was how I made an end, "your brother Jacques bids me to bring you to him to-night. It's four miles on the road to Montrichard."

During my narration Diane had watched me closely. When I told about the fight on the bakeshop steps and the bruises I took in my fall, moved by a sudden sympathy, she put her hand upon my arm. Tears came to her eyes.

"Ah, Sarto," she said, "you prove yourself my friend."

"Dear lady," I began, but fell to stammering.

Her fingers lingered for a moment and were gone like a fleeting pleasure.

"And does my brother," she asked, "bid me come to him merely for a parley, or do we journey off together?"

"Your brother bids you dress for travel."

"Then the Blessed Virgin is good to me," said Mademoiselle. She pointed to the distant palace. "I'll be quit of this place forever. My life has been unhappy here and in Paris."

Mademoiselle lapsed into silence. At length she spoke again: "Two of your enemies, Sarto, are now dead—Oliver and Maistro—only one is left."

"Of whom do you speak, Mademoiselle?"

Diane turned on me a searching look. "Do you not know," she said, "that King Louis is your enemy?"

"Then, Mademoiselle, he shows it strangely." I displayed the ring upon my finger which he had given me in the Tournelles. "See this!" I said. "And is not the Palais Saint Louis the gift rather of a friend?"

But Mademoiselle was disturbed. "Luca Sarto," she said, "if I had known on the night that I sent for you in Paris that you would grow to be my friend, I would not have sent for you."

"You speak a riddle, Diane."

"If I had known that it was my friend that I

would entangle in these plots, I could not have done it."

"Plots, Diane! You did but send me on an errand. I would have done more than you asked and thanked you for the opportunity."

Suddenly Diane faced me. Her eyes were full of trouble. "Have you thought, Sarto, who I am, and into what dangers I have led you? I have paid you ill."

"Peace, Diane. I am no youngling. I have eyes and ears. I knew that night in Paris that the King had you under watch. When the archer fell in the door, it showed it clear. And when you summoned me to bear your message, do you think that I did not know its import? The white rose is the color of England, lady. I have not smutched myself with much knowledge of the islanders, but I knew that much. So when Made-moiselle confessed herself of Burgundy, I knew the meaning of the message that I carried."

"And do you not see, therefore, how Louis is your enemy?"

"Two and two are four, Diane. But fear not! So long as Pope Paul totters and Rovere is likely to the office, so long am I safe with Louis."

"It is not so, Sarto. Trust not to Rovere now!

With a storm blowing up from the four corners of France, Louis will snap at all who have opposed him. As for his gifts—when Louis smiles most, he is the most to be feared. It is I, Sarto, who have meshed you in these plots. Do you not hate me for it?”

I laughed aloud. “Hate you, Diane?” I cried. “God knows that I love you. Dear lady—Diane—I would go down into yonder dungeon for your smile. Heaven is the color of your eyes. Such as I am, Diane, I offer you myself.”

She had dropped her head and sat silent at my outburst. Her arm hung idle at her side, and with my fingers I touched her wrist. At the touch she looked at me. Then as my fingers lingered, she closed on them and carried my hand to her breast. She smoothed back the fingers with a marvelously soft touch. Then she put my hand by. “Not now, Luca Sarto. There may come a time later when I’ll hear your message, but in these dangerous days be content to be my friend.”

“My thoughts, Diane, fly in the wind like smoke from a winter’s chimney. But I’ll bank my fire.”

She stretched out her hand to me and touched my cheek.

I was startled by the snapping of twigs. Diane had heard it too, and we both turned together. Behind us, fifty paces off, stood King Louis, stroking his chin to keep from smirking.

I arose in a rage, but Diane stayed me. "Sarto," she said, "it is his Majesty. Doff your hat!" She herself made a low curtsy. I swallowed my anger and followed suit.

Louis, by his grin, was in a pleasant mood. "Diane," he said, "my dear, I'm sorry to have frightened you. I crave your pardon. It's so sweet a day. The sunlight makes me young myself. Mademoiselle, I ask a favor." And he bent and kissed her hand. Then he spoke to me: "Monsieur, you woo the loveliest lady of our Court—a daughter in my affections. If I were once more the Dauphin, I'd push you as a rival." He laughed with a smiling show of teeth. "Tweet, tweet! The spring is here!" His crooked back disappeared under the trees.

Diane fell to trembling. "Oh, fear him, Sarto!" she said; "fear him when he smiles!"

"Methinks he was too far off to hear our talk, Diane."

"It does not matter. Without it he knows that we are intrigued with his enemies."

"Diane," I asked, "in how great danger do you stand?"

"Danger? Twice the Queen has warned me that I must be gone from Louis's clutches."

"Then your brother comes in the nick of time."

"Ay, he does. For weeks Louis has suspected me. I think that even now he spreads a net for his victims—to-morrow—perhaps even to-day. But to-night I shall ride off and not return."

She thought for a moment in silence. "Are the Orsini as dangerous as this Louis?" she asked. "Is not even Italy safer for you than France is now?"

I laughed, for a thought—perhaps her thought also—had come to me. "Mademoiselle, on these travels of yours, would you admit me to your company? I care little where I journey. There is nothing in the looks of this crooked Louis to hold me to his Court."

"Dear friend, we travel to Switzerland. You are welcome to go with us."

"God be praised!" I cried. "And do we start to-night?"

"An hour before the dusk," she answered, "if you will come for me."

Diane arose from the bench. "I am thankful

to have made a friend to-day, Luca Sarto."

"Diane," I answered, "you made a friend on that night in Paris when you came to me for shelter. You sat in my firelight, and I dreamed all the night of you. The wind has blown your name to me. And it has been in the soft patter of the rain. Wherever music has crossed the earth, you were the melody. I love you, Diane."

I took her hand and kissed her cheeks and lips.

Then silence came on us both. I watched her as she went lightly through the shrubbery, whose branches leaned forward to caress her. I heard the wind from the forest, felt the morning sunlight on my face, knew what vigor and beauty was in the world, yet myself was silent.

And so I left Diane, marveling on God's miracles. I went down the hill into the town. And over and over again her speech throbbed in me. And a melody sang in my head, of which her name was the whole.

And if you laugh, I'll strike you dead. In my own light days I'd seen men thus go pale, and I had tapped my head, as though their weakness lay there. Yet look upon me now! 'Tis a strange juice the pink god dips his arrows in, so to whirl the brain about.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DAY OF WONDERS

FOR the events I'll tell you now, priests were my witnesses. These are serious matters, not for a skipping ear. You must not sit and yawn upon the ceiling. If you cannot be attentive, it were better that you seek the jugglers for your entertainment.

It is to the Day of Wonders that I come now. I'll tell the events as the priests reported them. Commine's chronicle is wry and twisted from the truth.

I wish, on the one hand, not to throw discredit on the miracle, nor, on the other, to vouch for the facts of it. I write only what the priests have told me. You must judge for yourself whether the Madonna really nodded in the dusk.

But first, this, in general—for your instruction.

Between France and Italy there is a great difference. In France there is a readier belief in what is miraculous and beyond the common use. It is, so to speak, a village country, with a credent ear for priests. One would think that it had just

crept out of the thirteenth century, for it swears by Saint Dominic and by the cloak of Benedict. For all good men, both high and low—and for some that are not so good—there are orisons daily and nocturns of the psalter, matins of Our Lady, and of the Holy Cross.

This is not so in Italy, either in Vatican, or palace, or in gutter. Pious fervor of this kind would not have brought to light the buried ages. That was a task for wit and quick invention. Italy is all agog for Greece. It is no place to peddle relics of the church. *Pagan* is the persuasive word. *Hercules* fills well the mouth when an oath is needed. As for Hebrew, wherein the Scriptures were written, who knows a bit? Did the word pop up in talk, it's of the Dutch Fuggers we would think, lending their Jewish gold for usury. We have sheered far off the thirteenth century.

But in France chapels still leap across the mountains. A kiss on a holy nail dries a running sore. Church bells ward off witches. A dead Jew checks the plague. The seventh egg of a black hen upon a Friday never rots. In France it is still believed that women become pregnant by eating lilies. As for myself, I'll stab only the Jews that cheat me. I'll wait to see a flying

chapel. As for the innocent creatures that feed on lilies, I suspect a stealthy tread of heavy boots down the stairway in the dawn.

Yet—whatever be your own thought on miracles—you'll oblige me by not putting your thumb against your nose.

Louis dismissed his counselors with whom he had discussed the dire news from England and Brittany. He was in the high humor of his excitement. Here was a time to invoke the Virgin. He went from the palace and sought the Church of Saint Ours.

But first, as you know, he stumbled on me and Diane in the garden. He grinned with good humor as he went off. "Tweet, Tweet! The spring is here!" Then to himself, when he was beyond our hearing: "Tristan presently will come for Sarto. To-morrow will answer for Mademoiselle."

Louis shook off his merry mood, and as a suppliant he knelt before the Madonna. For this he had come on pilgrimage all the way from Paris, if by any chance she might stir with life and ease him of his complaints. The fires upon the Norman hills were naught, if he had strength to stamp them out.

He held his arms aloft. They were yellow, for his sleeves fell back. And he prayed that she, as in the days foregone, might come to life. A white garment was upon her and over this a pale blue mantel hung. A crown of gold was on her head. Her hair was yellow like ripened straw, and her eyes were blue. And oh that she might come to life! he prayed, and that some slight nodding of the head might so attest. It was in the chancel that he knelt, and the priests kept guard at the door so that his devotions might be undisturbed. Wondrous would be this day, if this should come to pass, as in the olden day, when she walked forth in the market-ways upon her blessed feet, and all who touched her garment were made whole. "Glorify thy Son," he cried, "that the Son may glorify thee." Then he bowed his head, with his palms open against the stones.

Thus through hours he agonized, and often glanced up for any sign. But no sign came, although his eyes and brain were fevered. Day went on, morning and noon, and still the King was prostrate. His hands and dress were smutched with the dust of the pavement, but he still kept upon his prayers. "Save me, God; for

the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God."

And twilight came and shadows, nor any candle was set about. And from the world outside there came a darkness on his spirits, that still the Madonna made no sign, nor nod nor yet a movement even of a finger. Then twilight passed, and the deeper shadows crept to the King. In gloom stood the Madonna, immobile.

And then, behold, there came the miracle—the same miracle as in those far off days when Jesus' blessed feet walked upon the streets of Palestine.

"Mother of God," he prayed, and his voice was weak, "Blessed Mary, comfort thy broken servant!" And when he had finished, he held his arms aloft and looked upon the Virgin's face. And in the darkness—give heed to this—in the darkness he saw some slight nodding of the Virgin's head. It was indistinct and then she stood stockfast again.

Up Louis arose, all cramped, but spluttering with the knowledge. About him flocked the priests, of whom one had also seen the nodding,

and they clamored of it. But this one priest had entered to lay vestments on the altar, and he had caught the movement by chance, yet was certain of it. And their excitement went buzzing all about and out through door and window. For they took it for a sign that soon the Virgin would be warm with life and would heal the sick with her garment's touch.

They prayed, but in confusion. One thus: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." And another: "The glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it." And they were amazed by what things they had seen, and the babble of it went forth.

This happened at the twenty-first hour, when it was already dark.

But the King, in a measure, was already mended. His back was straight and his head was high. At the church door he flung his crooked stick across the hedge.

Then the priests set lights about the church. But the Madonna stood silent in the glare nor could any eye catch another nod.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GOSSIP OF THE TREES

IT was a mad Sarto that trod the hill from his meeting with Mademoiselle. Aforetime had my head spun with the love of a woman, but here was a difference. I trod on air and laughed at the sunlight and the spring. Children romped on the street. Old women crooned at the windows. I had heard the tunes before, but had guessed not the happy lilt that lay within. All tunes scratch on an ugly mood, but put yourself in gladness and, God's Peace, it is a smiling world. This is a puzzle for those not deep in metaphysics.

I directed my steps toward the Gray Moon. It was my intention to pack my poor belongings and to furbish me a bit, before riding back to Mademoiselle.

Two hundred paces from the inn, Michel thrust out his face from a drinking shop. He was far gone with news, and in pain for delivery. "Master," he stammered, "as God's above!"—and other oaths not to the purpose.

"Bide a bit, Michel!" I cried. "Hold off! Breathe awhile! Tell the matter slowly!"

"Master," he said, "an half hour since Tristan called for you."

"Tristan, Michel? And where is he now?"

"Gone." But Michel wore a sly look. "I think, Master, that he will return."

"It's likely," I replied. "But we leave Loches to-night."

"It's none too soon, Master." Then roguishly: "Does Mademoiselle go with us?" For the varlet plays on my good nature.

I cuffed him for his insolence, and packed my wallet. Outside my window stood the towers of Loches. I was the brave mouse that had nested in a cat's ear.

A lover's day is long. I sat in the back room of the wineshop near my inn, yet I drained but a cup or two. It was a month before the close of afternoon. Joshua, methinks, was tampering again. The sun was stopped. At last I called Michel.

"Go to the inn," I said, "and bring out three horses. Pay the reckoning, and on any question say, as if unwillingly, that we journey up to Paris. Spread the lie around the stable."

Michel returned in half an hour. And now it came to me that for Mademoiselle's safety as well as my own, I must not show myself at the castle again. Tristan, the headsman, would be waiting for me.

I wrote a message. "Take this, Michel, to Mademoiselle. She will be waiting. Then bring her to me. I shall await you on the bridge."

We parted at the turn. Michel rode to the castle, and I to the bridge.

As there might be an hour to wait, I led my horse down to the water below the bridge and tied him where he could not be seen.

I had been sitting for a half hour, my thoughts on Mademoiselle and how marvelously things had chanced, when there was a great rattling overhead. I leaped to my feet, but the sound ceased suddenly, although dust filtered through the planking of the bridge. "Whoever they are," I thought, "they travel in haste." I peered from under the bridge down the road. Although the dust was thick, there were at least six horsemen. "King's men—" I thought; "archers, by their dress." They cantered sharply in the direction of Montrichard and were soon out of view. "I

know not," I muttered, "the errand of these fellows, but we must journey softly for fear of their return."

Then I fretted for the coming of Mademoiselle, for the afternoon was wearing on. It was already dusk when at last she came, and with her was Michel.

I mounted and rode beside her. "At last, Diane," I said, "we start upon our journey."

"May the Virgin help us on our way," she answered.

"As for yonder gray towers," I continued, "I shall live the happier if I never see them again."

Mademoiselle looked across her shoulder at the sullen mass which even at this distance rose above the trees, and she shuddered. "Let us hasten, Luca Sarto! We cannot be safe until we have put half of France between us and Louis's dungeons."

She quickened her pace to a lively trot. As for the King's troopers who rode ahead I said not a word, but kept a sharp lookout in the dusk.

I'll keep silent how the twilight fell upon the world. Your hunger is for speed and action. Events must stir and whirl. The sober history of Luca Sarto must be gulped as if it were an idle

tale. To spoon it out with fit description and so catch the nicer flavor is too slow a feeding for your impatience. I've marked the eye of one who thus races through a book, and I've seen his eager fingers twitching with the pages. I'll set forth, therefore, a lean and meager history.

The sun went through his western door and left twilight on the earth. And long shadows stretched across the fields to claim them for the greedy realm of night. And darkness came, and God hung out his lamps—Vega in the east, the Plowman to the north, and Boötes the Huntsman with his fiery dogs in leash. But Diane rode silent by my side.

Darkness came. A wind arose, and out of the darkness came the gossip of the woods. But although within the castle walls talk now ran upon the Virgin's nod, this great wonder was not known as yet to beech and oak, or they had trafficked of it in the wind. Therefore we were ignorant of the rummage and excitement on the hill.

But beech and oak knew that I loved Diane, and of this they gossiped across the hills.

CHAPTER XXVII

HERE ARE TWO MEN DEAD

IN a half hour we crossed a stone bridge where frogs croaked, and we saw before us the dim outlines of a farmhouse. "Diane," I said, "we have come upon your brother's hiding. Wait here in the shelter of this courtyard, while I poke about."

I knocked upon the door. There was no response.

I knocked again more loudly. It was a sound to set the echoes prattling, and yet the building seemed deserted. So I put my shoulder to the door and forced it open. I groped in with my hands before my face. I called softly. There was no reply.

The room was empty. On the floor was a pile of bed-clothes in disorder. I was about to return to Diane and tell her that we must await her brother's coming, when I observed that a chair was overturned and that a basin had fallen to the floor. The floor was freshly wet. "Jacques is clumsy," I thought. I bent over the bed-clothes.

There were marks of muddy boots upon the blankets. "Has there been a scuffle?" I thought. "Is it possible that the King's troopers have been here? Is Jacques taken? The lantern is lighted. These things, therefore, have happened since the dusk. But if Jacques is taken, why did not the troopers return to Loches?"

I went to the window to peer out, but a heavy cloth hung before it as though to conceal the lighted room from the courtyard. I called Jacques's name, then I stood perplexed.

I was startled by a step behind me. I whirled about. But it was Diane in the doorway. "And what has chanced!" she cried, shaking with excitement.

I did not reply. If you smell a danger, properly its concernment is your nose. It's best not to lay it on the tongue at first. If there was matter for alarm, it were well to have no swooning lady at the start. I put Diane off without naming the suspicions that I felt, and committing her to silence I left the room.

Our horses were as we had left them. A dark shadow on the road was Michel. I listened. There was no sound from the stables. And then: "I am mistaken," I thought. "There is a sound."

At first I could not give it form. It was a grinding sound, as though a soft fabric were being torn to shreds.

It came from the stables. I crossed a littered yard, and came close under the square window of a horse's stall. Then I laughed. Such fools do night and shadows make of us. The sound was a horse feeding within. I thrust my hand inside the opening. A horse put his nose into my palm, and one other horse at least rubbed against the first to come near.

"Motier is well supplied," I thought. "He has two or three horses."

So Motier was afoot. If not taken by these troopers, he could not be far away. I returned to the house.

Diane, with lamp in hand, was examining my discoveries with nearer light.

"What do you make of it, Diane?" I asked.

She pointed to the heel marks on the blankets. "Jacques is taken," she said.

"It is not so, Diane. While I waited for you beneath the bridge, troopers went out of Loches. But they went not back. If they had captured Jacques, we would have seen them as they returned. See, Diane, how the blankets are thrown

to a corner of the room! These are the marks of search, not of a scuffle. It's sure that Jacques heard them coming in time to hide. They tossed his blankets to find what he left behind."

"And where is Jacques now?"

"I know not, Diane. Yet I think that he is near at hand. Look how he has left a hanging at the window so that his light might not show to the road. If he be outside, we'll show him who his visitors are."

I set the light in the center of the room and pulled off the hanging from the window. "Come forward in the light, Diane, so that you show to the road."

It was but a moment before a face rose up against the glass. Diane cried out, "Jacques, my brother!"

Jacques raised a stone and smashed the glass. It was good pot glass, such as the glaziers had used at Chartres.

"Ha, Diane, my dear," Jacques cried, and he took her in his arms. Then he stood off. "Villainy's a-foot," he said. "The rascals have the measure of us. Here was I sitting with an ear on the road for your coming. Three times, when it was dark, I went to look. It was on this

last time that I heard the sound of horses. Does Diane travel in such company? I thought. Distrusting it, I crawled beneath a hedge. At the bridge that is just below, the company halted, and I heard voices bickering. Then they came forward toward this house, but monstrously quietly. And mark you, Tristan was one of them. I would know the man anywhere, except in heaven. Four and four they went into the courtyard, and no owl's look could I get of them further. And by Crispin, I was as cramped under the hedge as a tailor, but I durst not show my head. Yet I know not how the rogues came on the place of my hiding."

"Jacques Motier!" I broke in, "you had best be short. We are close beset."

Motier did not heed the interruption. "Then the villains came out," he continued. "Tristan was in front and passed so near that I could have tripped him. He was snarling to those behind for their clatter on the bridge. At that he spied a light in a building farther up the road. 'So, so,' he said, 'we may have been mistaken in the place.' Up they mounted and rode off, Tristan hushing them. But I followed until they were safely off."

I listened with impatience. We were beset with danger as long as Tristan and his men were on the roads. So I cut him short. "Jacques," I said, "ease your tongue! Tristan will be back on us. We must hurry. Have you horses?"

"One," said Jacques.

"One?" I knew that there were two horses at least in the stable. "Then who owns the other, Jacques?" I cried. "How many men came riding with Tristan?"

"Eight, four and four."

"And how many rode away?"

"God!" he cried, "six!"

We were on our feet in an instant.

"Hold up!" I said. "We'll post Michel in front to warn us if Tristan returns. Then we will smell out these two fellows that he left."

We found Michel as we had left him. There were no sounds upon the road. "Sarto," said Jacques, "behind the stable there is a lane that leads across the fields and out on the road beyond. Tie our horses there, against the chance that Tristan cuts us off in front."

We brought out Jacques's horse and left him with the others. And now I laughed aloud. "It's two against two, you rascals. Or if there

are three of you, let one run off and bellow for a coffin maker. Come out, you pups!"

I drew my sword, a light thrusting weapon. In my left hand I carried a dagger, for I fight as an Italian.

Then we came from the stable. In the doorway of the house stood Diane, holding a lantern high above her head so that it threw shadows to the corners of the yard. It was a pretty staging for a fight. In the lantern's light were two moving forms. "The one to the left is mine," said Jacques.

They came forward bravely. And then I could have laughed, for the fellow opposite me carried an old-fashioned, two-handed sword, of a kind my grandfather used. It was, however, of the latest mode of France, which lags somewhat in these things. With such inequality there could not be a pretty bout, thrust against thrust. Yet there was some danger in the heaviness of his strokes.

In shadow I waited his coming.

He held his sword in both his hands, the blade swung aloft above his shoulder. Onward he came with a smashing blow, but I jumped aside, and he struck fire upon the stones. "Monsieur," I cried,

"you're clumsy with your cleaver. You need practice on an ox." Then while he recovered balance, I circled round him. And so I brought him to a better light, for I wished to look him up and down to see what chance there was that he wore chain beneath his shift. If so, it would make a difference in my fence. As for me, I wore no chain.

Then, in a flash, I lunged on him. I flicked a button from his doublet, but could reach no farther.

Then I struck him full on the breast. He reeled, but the chain below saved him. "Devil take your smithy's shirt," I cried, but I kept him wheeling about, while I contrived attack.

And now he was in good anger that he had not felled me by his heavy strokes, and he came skipping toward me. I stepped beneath an overhanging gutter, and on this his blow fell. While he was still tottering from the impact, I caught him on the wrist. Then I pricked his ear. He staggered back, but I drove against him and reached his throat above the chain. He fell headlong, and I leaped on him with my dagger.

It was ended. He gave a cry and rolled against the wall. It was a narrow river that he crossed

and already he was in the shade beyond, past leech and priest.

Motier's fight was longer and more equal, for both fought with the heavy French swords. I watched its clumsy progress, until Motier with a butcher's stroke quite broke the other's head. We wiped our swords on the fellows' cloaks.

"And now," said Jacques, "we had best be on our travels. The lane brings us to the highroad to the east of Tristan. We will come cranking out beyond him. Montrichard lies three miles beyond."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WIND SHIFTS UNTIL IT BRINGS THE RAIN

AND now Michel came running. "Master," he blurted, "they are coming."

Jacques snarled when he heard it. "The lane is our only chance," he said.

Beyond the out-buildings the lane was exposed to the road, which lay parallel to us. Jacques drew rein and turned to me. "Shall we make the hazard?" I nodded. We were half way across the open bit, when there were shouts from the road.

We had been mincing until the moment. Now we spurred up. Presently the lane skirted a hill that was covered with woods. On a sudden Jacques drew up. "We make too big a clack," he said. "There 's more bounce than speed in us. These fellows will be on us in a mile. We had best go through the woods."

"And where will it lead us?" I asked.

"Not to Louis's dungeon," he answered. "Otherwise I know not. But we 'll contrive to

come on the highroad near Montrichard, with Tristan behind us."

We were well to the top of the hill and in concealment when we heard horses gallop past on the road below.

We now proceeded with caution for perhaps a mile, easy going for the most part, as we came on a forest path. Then, at the foot of a decline, we saw a smudge of light. It was from the fire of a charcoal burner. Jacques roused him. "Perhaps," he said, when the fellow had come from his hut and had blinked upon us, "perhaps, you can put us on the road to Montrichard."

"The path goes there," the fellow grunted.

In a quarter of an hour we came again upon the highroad. In the distance we saw the outlines of the castle of Montrichard and below the lights of the town. Jacques was in high glee. "Tristan is behind us," he said. "We have traveled on a wider circuit, and have come out beyond him."

"Hold a bit!" I said. "It's an even guess. The villains were riding fast. Tristan may have gone forward instead of back. Where there is a village, there is drink. In his discontent, he has gone on to a tavern. His gullet is his compass."

"No," said Jacques, "he 'd think he 'd been mistaken in our shadows. It was one man he came to get. The four shadows must have bothered him. When he came to the highroad without sight of us, he decided that he was mistaken. He went back to the farmhouse for another rummage. And so we 'll go on," was how he ended.

But I took him by the shoulder. "Peace, you fool!" I cried. "Let me talk! I 'll go forward with Michel. You and Diane hide here. When we learn that Tristan is surely behind us, then we can go forward safely."

Jacques grumbled, but Diane hushed him.

She and Jacques hid, and Michel and I went on with caution.

It was scarcely bedtime and a few of the villagers were still awake. I called to one of them. "Is there an inn hereabouts?"

"Henri, down the road," he answered, "can give you a bite and a bed."

We came upon the inn. A light flared out.

"I 'll first squint in the windows," I said. "Wait here, Michel, and hold my horse!"

I peered through the shutters. Two sleepy countrymen sat nodding on their cups. There were no dirty cups or slop upon the other tables.

Tristan and his fellows had not been here.

"Tapster," I said, "a cup of wine!"

He drew it and put it before me. "There's nothing much to-night in the way of business," I began.

He was a most unsocial fellow, and he only grunted.

"And yet," I continued, "the King has come to Loches. Monsieur Tristan of the Court and a band of merry fellows are on the roads to-night. If they knew the merit of this wine, they would have paid you a visit." I turned to the nodding countrymen. "Fresh cups for these good men," I added.

They wakened, for a thirst has ears. "Tristan," said one of them, "went by a good half hour since."

"So," I asked, "and which way was he going?"

The fellow jerked his thumb to the east.

On a sudden I saw Michel waving at me through the window. "Eh," I said, "perhaps I hear him coming now."

I went to the door. Michel drew me to the shadow, where he had already led our horses. There was a sudden clatter, and the horsemen passed, toward Loches.

And now, if Jacques had kept to his hedge, Tristan would have galloped by. But, mark the dunce! Despite Diane's protest Jacques had come out to spy about.

The end came quickly, and I was too far off to be of any use. I spurred my horse and bawled abuse upon the villains, but was too late. Jacques was taken. *Dio*, such is ill luck! Had I been by, things would have happened differently. I've pepper in me. I would have taken heavy toll. I would have killed five of the varlets at least. If Jacques had had the brains of a louse he would have kept to his hedge.

So Jacques was taken. Already the horsemen were off a quarter mile. Diane, it seems, had begged Tristan to take her also. But he had thrust her off. She now sat beside the road, swaying back and forward in despair. I touched her arm, but had no speech for such calamity. I carried her to her horse and set her on. "There 's hope yet," I said. "Sicker cats get well."

"Blessed Mary," she said, and fell to praying.

"Where now, Diane?" I asked.

She pointed back to Loches.

"Our freedom lies the other way, dear lady," I said.

But she was firm.

It was a doleful piece of road to Loches. As we entered the town we heard a soldier bawling the news that Jacques was captured.

So now you see that not all toothsome is my tale. Grief and stain of blood have part in it. It's bitter for me to write down such a melancholy end. I'd rather make blythe tunes for jigs. Yet there is due a straight sequence of these affairs. Sarto is valiant, but he cannot fight when his enemies are a good mile off.

The soldiers bawling the news had brought to their doors all the village folk. They piled out, buttoning as they came, with chatter like monkeys. Children, too, there were, unsmocked for the night, their bareness popping from their shifts. One would have thought that the players had come, or that performing bears were in the town.

We plodded up the hill and entered the castle by the nearest gate. Here I dismissed Michel. At an inner door, Marie, the tirewoman, was awaiting Diane, half dressed. She was hysterical and crying, for she had heard the news. The two women departed together, and I was left on the stairs.

I am not easily cast down, for a buoyant nature

is in me. And yet I was depressed. The night had fallen to such calamity, and only two men were dead to pay the price. The Lady Diane's tears had been purchased at too low a rate. Fate had played the Jew with me.

I stood thus, undecisive, and flicked the cobwebs with my sword. What was there to do, worthy the name of action, and of what accomplishment? Though I pondered deeply, no plan of force or guile came to my brain, and my only havoc was with the cobwebs.

For a long time I might have lingered, had I not heard footsteps on the circular steps above me. The sound was soft and even, and came winding toward me.

It was an ill-shaped figure and malignant face that came into view. Its expression was unchanged at seeing me. It was as though the man had expected my coming and had waited for me. It was Tristan, the headsman. The strands had met.

There is a French proverb: The wind shifts until it brings the rain.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DICE STILL FALL TO THE DEUCE SPOTS

IF you have thought that Diane succumbed to defeat, you'll see how grievously you reckoned.

When she had left me on the stairs and the door was shut, first she hushed Marie, for the wench was sobbing. "Marie," she said, "you make a bad matter worse."

Marie stanchd her tears upon her skirt.

"You saw my brother brought to Loches?"

"Ay, dear lady, so I did." The waters rose again, but she sluiced them on her kerchief.

"And where did they take him?"

Marie pointed through the window. "There was gossip that they would put him in the dungeons. Jean told me, who was on the street when they came."

"Jean?"

"Jean is betrothed to me. He is in the King's guard."

"Oh, I remember the man. Did the King see my brother brought in?"

"Ay. The King was above, at a window, as they passed; for Jean saw him. Tristan waved his cap to the King as they went below.

"Perhaps you know where the King is now."

"No."

"Is it likely that he is with the Queen?"

Marie shook her head. "I do not know, Mademoiselle."

Diane sat down upon a stool and clasped her knees. "Hold yourself quiet, Marie! I must think upon the tangle." It was a few moments before she spoke, then half to herself. "My only chance lies with the King. It's him I must prevail on." She arose from the stool. "I must seek the King."

"To-night? Now?"

"Now. On the instant."

"Shall I come with you, Mademoiselle?"

"Please you, no. You'll wait here for my return."

Diane cloaked herself. She turned upon the sill. "Hold up your chin, Marie! The night's not done."

The wench sat with her mouth open.

Diane left her so. And first she looked to see whether I was still upon the landing. But I was

gone. Then with a quick step she went down the stairs and into the garden. The King's palace lay but a hundred paces off. A sentry stood at the door.

Diane came before him. "Do you know me," she asked.

"You are Mademoiselle Diane."

"I've business with the King."

The fellow scratched his head. "But the King is not here," he said.

"So?"

"It's a half hour since the King went to the Church of the Madonna of Saint Ours."

"Methinks there is no service."

"Mademoiselle has not heard the news?"

"Of what sort?"

"Dear lady, they say the Virgin has come this night to life."

Diane crossed herself. The sentry also, Diane lifted her head first. "Mary be praised!" she said, but she was amazed.

The sentry mumbled his prayers longer than she. Then he spoke again: "It happened before the dark. It was a marvelous sight. Queen of Heaven," he muttered, "save us by thy mercy!"

"Mary be praised!" Diane repeated. Then—still in amazement, "The Virgin lives." Afterward she addressed the sentry, "So that is why the King is in the Church."

"Ay, it is."

"Perhaps the Virgin has already wrought a cure in him."

"They say she has, Mademoiselle. Those that saw him pass say that his humped back was straight."

Diane passed on her way, but she was deep in thought.

It was another hundred paces to the door of the church. A priest was cooling himself upon the steps. "Father," said Diane, "is the King within?"

"The King prays in his oratory in the crypt."

"Will you take me to him?"

The priest held up his hand. "It is forbade," he said. "The King gives his thanks to God."

But as he made no move to hinder her, she slipped by him into the church. She came into the transept, which was dark except for a blur of light from the crossing. She stumbled against some stools and benches, then fumbled her way toward the light. Half way up the choir was the

statue of the Madonna. Candles were set about it, the soft light falling on her blue garments and on her face. Diane knelt for a moment on the stones in silent prayer. A priest was mending the lights.

"Father," she said, "which door leads to the King's oratory?"

He pointed to the dusk. "It's the first along the wall."

Diane motioned with her finger. "Is that the door?" she asked.

"Ay, Mademoiselle."

"To his oratory?"

"Ay, to his oratory—and to his dungeons, for that matter."

"To his dungeons?"

"They say a secret passage leads beneath the building."

He went on about his work.

Diane found the door in the second bay. She turned its handle. Then she rattled it. It was fast locked. She turned back to the priest for help. By this time, however, he had set fresh candles in the sconces and had gone off. She heard the door slam behind him at the farther end of the transept.

Again Diane rattled the door to the King's crypt. Then she put her ear to the keyhole. There was no sound. Nor any glimmer of light. There was a bench at hand, and Diane set herself upon it. "If I but knew," she thought, "how long the King stays at his prayers."

At first she was for sitting on the bench before the door to await the King. Then her thoughts went to the Queen, for a dim hope lay there. "I'll see the Queen first," she thought. "She has been my friend. The King later."

As she passed near the Virgin, she crossed herself and bowed her head in prayer. "Blessed Mary," she said, "I, also, need your help. Have you no cure for my calamities?" And she doubled herself again upon the pavement. She raised her eyes. The Virgin was stock fast. Diane's hope went down. "My prayers are not as potent as the King's," she said. Two of the candles, overlooked by the priest, spluttered in their sockets and went out.

At the door of the church Diane paused. The priest with whom she had spoken first was sleeping with his head propped against the wall.

The sentry was still on duty outside the palace. Diane accosted him and went inside. The

Queen, she was told, was settled for the night, but would see her.

Diane came beside her bed. "Your Majesty," she said, "may you have pity on me!"

The Queen lifted herself on her elbow. "Diane," she asked, "what ails you?" She took her hand and drew her close until the light fell on her face.

"It 's Jacques, my brother."

"Ay, Diane, it 's so they told me."

"I must see the King to-night."

"There 's no help there, my dear. The King would mock you."

"Methinks the Virgin may have softened him."

"You think that the Virgin's coming to life may have changed his nature?"

"It 's sacrilege to doubt the Virgin's power."

The Queen paused in thought. "But the King is not here, Mademoiselle."

"They tell me, your Majesty, that he prays in his oratory."

"And I tell you, Diane, that he has gone to his dungeons."

"Then I 'll seek him in his dungeons."

The Queen shook her head. "It 's wasted effort."

Then on a sudden Diane cried out: "It's to-night that my prayers will avail. The King will be most marvelously set up. The Virgin will have wrought him to a giving mood. By morning the ecstasy may be off."

The Queen rocked her head in thought. "The chance is slim. Yet it's blasphemy to doubt the Virgin's power. Prop me those pillows at my back. Fetch me my writing desk. I'll write you a safe-conduct to the dungeons. May the Holy Virgin help you!"

She wrote for a moment. "See," she said, "I've written it blank of names. It's best that the guard know not who you are. Stay! You cannot go alone."

"My maid sits up for me."

"Then I'll write the pass for two—but without names."

"Have you a key, your Majesty, to the King's passage from his crypt?"

"No."

"It would be the better entrance, and would avoid the guardroom."

The Queen thought for a moment. "A priest," she said, "would have the key. Perhaps my pass will persuade him."

Diane took direction and a caution that she go veiled against the rudeness of the soldiers. The Queen then kissed her on the cheek. "I shall pray, Diane," she said, "that the Virgin may have prevailed on Louis."

Diane came off, clutching the pass in her fingers.

Now the building in which Diane lodged lay along the garden. Her rooms, as I've told you, were in an upper story, for the lowest story was given entirely to a great hall, with kitchens and larders at the end. The garden had been dark when she had crossed it but a few minutes since. But now rays of light fell on it from the windows of the hall.

Her path took her by the windows. The room lay plainly in sight.

On a sudden she stopped. Something in the room had caught her eye. There was shrubbery here, and she held back the branches to see more clearly. What she saw froze her.

She sought her own room, running.

Marie let her in. Diane panted with fright and hurry.

"Marie, you told me that your lover is a guardsman."

"So he is."

"Methinks, as I came by, I saw him in the great hall below."

"So? It was but a minute after you left that I thought I heard his voice and that of Tristan."

"Tristan?" Mademoiselle cried out. "The headsman?"

"Ay, and Monsieur Sarto's too. I heard them below."

"Listen, Marie! Jean, your lover, stands guard in the hall below."

"Guard, Mademoiselle?"

"Peace, Marie, until I finish!"

"As God 's in Heaven, lady—"

Diane took her by the wrist and drew her to the window. "Stand out there in the darkness and cry in distress to your lover to come to you."

Marie stopped her whimpering. "When shall I do this, Mademoiselle?"

"From the path you can see what happens in the great hall. When you see me enter, count four times around your fingers, then cry out!"

From the drawer of her dressing table, Diane took a small knife. She put it in the fold of her skirt. Then she thrust Marie before her from the room.

They went down the stairs together. At the

foot was the door to the garden. Marie went off in the darkness.

As for Diane, she stood a bit before the door to the great hall, and listened with her ear upon the crack. Then she opened the door and went within.

CHAPTER XXX

HERE IS THE VILLAIN

THE wind had shifted until it brought the rain. It was Tristan whom I saw on the stairs.

Sarto has lived in Naples where villains breed like maggots in a cheese. And, also, he has roamed a bit in these last ten years, and seen, all about, a deal of rogues. And yet neither north nor south has he met as dirty a piece of flesh as this Tristan.

He touched my arm and pointed down the steps. "I'll follow after, Monsieur," he said. He came down three steps behind me, with his bad breath on my neck.

"How now, sir," I asked, when we were on the level.

"It's the King," he tittered, "who sends to honor you. He bids us wait in the great hall."

I looked him up and down. "The King sends a strange legate. His stable will go short."

Again Tristan tittered. "Monsieur is pleasant," he said.

We were now come to the great apartment on the ground level. Through the windows on one side of the room I could see the occasional lights of the town of Loches, far below us. The opposite windows looked out upon a garden.

Tristan snapped his fingers. Several guardsmen thrust their heads inside the door. I squared myself to meet them and put my hand upon my sword. "What means this patch?" I cried.

Tristan waved the guardsmen forward. Then he fell to rubbing his hands. "It means, Monsieur, that I arrest you."

"You skunk's meat," I cried out. "Do you think to touch an artist?"

"Put up your sword, Monsieur! The odds run against you."

For answer I edged my back against a corner of the room. "Perhaps, Tristan," I cried, "you will be the one to come and take it."

Tristan held off.

There were now as many as six guardsmen in the doorway, with a patter of feet outside as more came up. The circle was closing in.

"Tristan," I cried, "hold your army off! On what charge do you arrest me?"

"Aiding the King's enemies. It's treason, Monsieur."

"Treason?" I cried. "I am not a Frenchman."

Tristan shrugged his shoulders.

"Does Louis command my arrest?"

"Ay, Monsieur."

"Sarto will not fight the whole French army." I threw down my sword. "I submit. Take me to the King!"

And now, although I had disarmed myself and had yielded to them, three guardsmen threw themselves on me. I struggled to free myself, spluttering at the outrage, but went down under them. Five of them at least sat upon my chest, while they tied my legs with cord. Then they rolled me over and bound my hands behind my back. It was foul treatment. At the last they put me in a great chair, and tied me in.

This disregard of ceremony angered me intensely. The ill-smelling clodpoles had mussed my lace cuffs and had put their greasy hands upon my face. It does not sort with my humor to be seized behind and tumbled about like a performing clown—by a jack-in-office, by a dunghill groom, by such a pimpled fellow as this Tristan. I shall not tell what I said. It smacked of the

wharves, and pink-and-lily youth must not read it.

Tristan laughed at my anger. He was a merry fellow. And yet it was not real laughter. Tristan squeaked his mirth. It's false music. Real laughter wears wrinkles on its nose and comes brawling from the mouth. Tristan's laughter was sour as if pickled for the winter.

Tristan felt the knotted cords and inspected me closely. "You will pardon me," he said mockingly, "if I am too curious. It's a hobby of mine—a study of my craft."

As he spoke he played on my throat with his dirty fingers. Then he held a pointed finger up to me, like a master to his class. "There is much difference in necks," he said, wagging his finger back and forth. "Yours is good; neither so large as to be annoying to a headsman—it frets me if the neck does not snap upon the blow—nor yet too small. Monsieur, it will be a pleasure. We shall meet again."

Tristan now marshaled his guardsmen at the door. One he set to watch me, lest I squirm from my cords. Then he led the others off. I heard their steps die upon the gravel path.

The next ten minutes I wriggled at my cords. But the headsman had been cunning on the tying

of them, and they did not yield. Then I tried to bribe my guard. He sat stolid, nor could I get a word from him.

I was puzzling on how I might tempt him, when I heard a sound from the darkness of the garden. Looking closely, I saw Diane—Diane, in the garden. Fright was on her face. She stood in the shrubbery, in the window's glow, and looked straight at me. But she disappeared without a word.

Then ten minutes passed, and I heard footsteps in the entry. The guardsman heard it, too, and he cocked his head upon its side. "Eh," he said, "does Tristan return?"

But it was not Tristan. It was Diane who entered, anxious and with fear. She closed the door behind her.

Diane showed no surprise at my confinement. She turned upon the guardsman. "Jean," she said, "Marie's gone off. I do fear that mischief's come to her.

The guardsman turned his eyes on Diane, and caught her fear.

And now, on the instant, there was a noise of feet from the path outside. Then there was a

woman's cry, piercing and shrill. Then a moment stripped bare of sound.

Diane had the guardsman by the sleeve. "It's Marie's voice!"

The guardsman shook her off and ran to the window.

A second cry came from the darkness. "Jean, Jean!" The guardsman threw down his arquebus and ran from the room, shouting, "Marie, I'm coming."

I was alone with Diane.

CHAPTER XXXI

AT THE FOOT OF THE WINDING STAIRWAY

SO it fell out that Jacques was brought to Loches with a clattering escort. Men and boys ran ahead of them with lanterns and torches, shouting and calling the news, and night-capped heads were thrust out with brawl of question. And the King drew back his window-hangings and was amused by the carnival below him. Then they swept on to the dungeons.

The approach is a grove of neglected lime trees, to a wooden door in a stone wall. The great keep, built years ago by Fulk the Red, is at the left. At the right is the keeper's house, and beyond is a tower that is smaller than the great tower, but still ponderous.

These towers resemble the mountains of ice that move south from the frozen seas, for the bulk above the surface is less than that below. This further tower holds the dungeons for political prisoners. Cardinal Balue is below. Ludovic is to come there later. As for Burgundy and

Guienne, Louis's sides would have shaken with mirth if he could have lodged them there. Most evil abodes are these dungeons—the very thought of them makes me keck—and so they will be until the finger of Time shall have wrought cranies between their stones. In the centuries to come a wind will rise and lightning. And when the storm abates, the French will thank God for the crumbled stones upon the hillsides.

But on the night of May the seventeenth, fourteen hundred and seventy-one, the walls were strong and dark and sullen.

Now the cavalcade came near and lanterns were tossed about. And when the guardsmen came between the lanterns and the walls their great shadows out-topped the battlements. The Magician, who once escaped from the fisherman's jug in smoke, hardly grew so fast.

Motier had been put in irons. He dismounted stiffly at the door in the wall, and thence he was hurried to the entrance of the smaller tower, seeing nothing as he went except the keeper's little daughter who stood upon the doorsill and munched a piece of black bread, wondering. What dreams a child must have, cradled there!

The first room was a guardroom with troughlike

bunks. As the crowd entered, heads were raised and querulous voices asked in the devil's name what the pother was about. Beyond was a passage, and at its end a circular flight of steps. Down they went, Motier first, two guardsmen following. One of them held up a lantern. At a landing they passed a wooden door, studded with nails and with a wicket.

"Old Bailli's wheezing again. It's down on his lungs at last. In God's name why does n't he die?" This from one of the guardsmen. He prodded Motier with his toe. "Step a bit faster! My supper's waiting."

The other guardsman spat upon the wall. "Ti lump de lump lump!" he sang contentedly.

They came to another landing. The first guardsman pointed his thumb toward the wicket in the door. Then he smirked. "It's Balue's," he said. "Mark what will happen!"

He put his lantern on the floor and set his mouth to the opening. "Yo, ho!" he called.

There was no sound in answer. The guardsman called again: "What ho, Master Balue!" Then he grinned like a showman before he pulls the curtain, and he put his fingers on his lips lest any one should speak and spoil the comedy.

A moan came from the wicket. Presently an old man's face showed at the opening. The eyes blinked in the light. The skin was as white as the under side of a mushroom, and it hung flabby on his cheeks. The voice left was but a squeak. "Sirs," it said, "has my time run out? Has the King softened toward me? I beseech you tell him it was not I who betrayed him at Peronne."

Motier had shrunk back against the wall at the first sight of the face, and had turned his head. His stomach sickened.

The musical guardsman recalled the words of a popular song. He spat again and sang it. It was the song the wench and I had sung at Melum.

"Maître Jean Balue
A perdu la vue
De ses Évêchés; —"

Down they went again. At the third turn they came to the lowest level. One of the guardsmen put an iron key in a lock and pushed the door open.

There was a smell came out as though Time itself had died and rotted there. The fellow set the light upon the floor, and Motier looked about

him. It was a bare stone room, four paces square. The stones were a bit green and water dripped from the vaulting. In the corner was a plank set at a slant for bed and pillow. There was also a wooden table and a stool. Of the table one leg had rotted and fallen off, so it was crutched against the wall. Half way up this wall there was a narrow window, buried in three feet of stone thickness like a fat man's eye; for the tower was set on the slant of the hill, and a level that was far below ground on the one side was thus open to daylight on the other. Such was the width of the window, however, that the light pinched itself to wriggle through.

So far, the room was like any other dungeon. Now mark a difference! At the side farthest from the entrance there was another opening. It was the width of a stride, and was closely guarded by iron bars, or rather by an iron gate, for there were hinges. It was black beyond.

Motier pointed to this. The guardsman grinned but said nothing. Motier crossed the room and squinted through. The darkness was absolute.

"Where does it lead?" he asked.

The guardsman put the lantern and some dishes on the table, and wiped an iron spoon on his stocking. "It's time for gruel," he said.

As Motier did not come at once, he became impatient. "Come!" he cried. "There will be time to look later. All day to-morrow, and next year, with no one to interrupt."

He shook with his own humor. Then, when Motier had pulled the stool to the table and had seated himself, he slipped an iron ring over his ankle and clasped it. To the ring was attached a chain, spiked to the stone floor.

With a tart good night, he swung the door closed behind him and was gone, leaving Motier to eat his supper in the darkness.

Jacques's nights had been passed in cities, where sound is always rising, or in the fields, where the air is alive with the rustle of growing things, of insects, or wind, or distant dogs barking. But about him now was silence, except for the one sound of dripping water—at first only a single dripping, slow and regular. Then from the passage outside there came an answering drip. Then into this mesh of sound came the echoes, and with them strange fantasies, rising and falling, and yet

always the same—the scurry of syncope, phrases from the dance—and then the whole fury and clamor of it fell to monotone and dirge.

So, under that hill of stone, there was one who crouched in terror, while the towers stood above ragged in the night, and the moon came from among the clouds and sent silver shadows across the world. Alas, moonlight shines upon a tomb even while the worms are at their feast below.

And now I write of a cat and mouse, and how the cat playfully cuffed the mouse with a velvet paw.

After the road had cleared of the procession, the King waited at the window long enough to see Diane and me pass. Then he went by himself and thanked the Blessed Mary for her benefits.

And now he went to the church again. It is distant from the palace an English arrow's flight, but from the dungeons the space a bombard carries. As he entered, the priests and acolytes, with excitement sprung from the Virgin's nod yet strong upon them, were pattering all about, laying hands on this and that, finding pretext to be around and observe the issue.

To them the King came and he packed them on

their ways, and paused until all of them were gone, both lean and fat, and their excitement like smoke had gone thin into the air outside.

But when alone, he knelt not before the row of candles, nor anywhere.

The crypt door is in the second bay. Beyond are stone stairs descending, with a lantern at the top. Down these steps the King went, first fastening the door behind him and rattling it to make sure. He knew these steps, but he held the light above his head and reached out with his hand.

At the bottom was his oratory. At one end was a daub of Saint Francis, and beneath it was a shabby altar. But the King did not go to this. His business was of another kind. First he took from the folds of his cloak a poniard, and set his thumb against the point to test its sharpness. The King took down, also, a sword which hung from a peg, and flourished it. His wrist, although not as limber as a younger man's, was skillful.

Then having pulled his garments about him, he jerked his cap over his eyes, opened a second door, and passed from sight. He moved with the stealth of a cat who goes hunting in the night.

Once out of the crypt, the King was in a vaulted passage, which led at a downward slant beneath

the length of the church. To blurt my knowledge—for I know not how to whet the appetite by withholding sweets—to blurt my knowledge and set forth at once the very cake of my narration, it was to the dungeons that this passage led, and it was with Motier that the King had commerce. For him the haste, the poniard, and the grin.

Many times before had the King's shadow slipped along these walls and vaults, for this underground approach appealed to his love of the grotesque. He was by instinct a masquerader. As a young man, before his father, the old King, died, he frequented the low resorts of Rouen and Tours, in the guise of a drunken reveler, to learn the rumors of the city: or he sat in the corner of a wineshop and watched the traffic of the place, listening to the chatter that arose from the cups. Or he made himself a crony, passing for a merchant in his gray fustian doublet.

To-night, however, he was not a masquerader. He was the King. He had captured a man who had eluded him for years. Motier was in the counsel of Charles of Burgundy. He was in communication with the English, who had used Calais aforetime as a spring-board into France. There was much to be learned from such a man as to

when the run and leap might be expected. He would see him on the night of his capture. It was better than a raree-show—better certainly than an evening bobbing over dull papers with the papal legate. He struck his sword against the solid wall, and grinned at its strength. Then he walked on, humming a song he had heard once, a humorous thing about a cat and a mouse.

“And I cuff your ear, and I cuff your nose.
Yo ho, ding ding, hi diddley Ohs!”

There came a massive door before him. He unlocked it and pushed it open and left it so. A rat ran under his kingly feet. It recalled a second verse of the song, and he sang it with spirit, for a fine humor was on him. At the end of each line his high cracked voice trolled the refrain: “Yo ho, ding ding, hi diddley Ohs!” Such an ear has this King, such a voice, and such a merry heart—when mischief’s up.

He was now below the walls of his dungeons, and close to the room where Motier was imprisoned. Then presently there was an iron grating, and he looked through. The grating was that which guarded Motier’s cell.

At the sound of the footsteps and the glimmer

of light, Motier had leaped to his feet. He saw the King looking between the iron bars.

The King began drily. "Good evening, Jacques Motier! We have not met for several years."

"The King of France!" Motier exclaimed.

"And of Burgundy, too!" the King added. "Don't forget to mention Burgundy, young man, or I shall be offended. Times have changed since Philip died, my dearly beloved cousin (as the treaties say), who I can only hope went to heaven. And would that his son Charles would go, too—and speedily."

He unlocked the gate and entered, cautiously, with a measuring and careful eye to the chain on the prisoner's ankle, keeping beyond its length.

He put the light on the stones, well out of Motier's reach, then straightened himself with grunts, for his regal back was cramped. The hand that did not nurse his back rested with finger tips upon the wall. Below his fingers were rough characters hacked in the stones. The King felt the unevenness and turned, squinting on it.

"Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria."

"Dante," he said. "Dear me, I must have had an Italian locked in here. Sarto's another, who will be down presently. What a comfort our poets are!"

There was a smirk upon his face as when a clown has done his trick. "Yet Dante's rare," he said. "Mostwise my prisons are filled with Sunday stuff. I've alleluias on these walls to fill a church. My dungeons cry out to God." There was still a grin upon his mouth, although he crossed himself upon the word and threw his eyes for a moment upward.

"If I had known that you were coming! Your visit is unexpected. It's mischance I've no room prepared. Those that overlook the garden are taken. Yet it galls me to play so poor a host. Balue, also, came upon me so. But I fixed him up a cage, and there the fine fellow sings happily all the day, although they say his teeth fall out. Humor my mood, Jacques! I'm so glad to see you."

His mouth was a dirty channel to pass such a stinking flood. Here's how Jacques answered him:

"You're the same sly cat you always were."

But Jacques, although his tongue was brave,

was frightened. If he spoke with courage, it was because some former thoughts had left stinging words convenient to his tongue. Any present mintage would have had a tremor in it. For Jacques had had a sickish time, squatting a half hour in the dark. And now had come this Louis like a foul dream to plague him further.

Louis smiled. "Oh!" he said, "so Jacques is Louis's mouse. I'll take care to play the part. It's my velvet paw to-night, Jacques. I but cuff you with it. My humor will be sterner in the morning. Enough of this! It's ill that the Majesty of France should bandy words with his liegeman."

"Liegeman!" Jacques' tone was sour. "Liegeman! My hand has been given to Burgundy, who is fellow to yourself. Burgundy does not doff to France."

This Jacques, I confess, gets metal in him. There's Italian fiber in this fellow. Mark how he reviles the King!

"Majesty of France!" he snarled. "It's soiled cloth, Louis. You fit it vile."

But Louis was not roused. It would appear he liked the taunt. It was candied marchpane on his tooth.

"This Burgundy that you brag of, Jacques, is my cousin. By way of manners only, I'll ask you of his health. Yet if it break, Louis will sleep as sound."

"Burgundy!" answered Jacques, "the Duke of Burgundy remembers how your uncle, Louis of Anjou, sent home his kinswoman, Catherine, and vilely broke his betrothal to her."

Louis smiled. "My compliments," he said, "to my uncle in refusing alliance with Jean *sans Peur*."

"Alliance!" Jacques retorted; "was not your father called in derision 'the King of Bourges'—King of a muddy town, who dared not ride beyond Touraine, lest his enemies pull his nose?"

There was a pause as long as a *Pater Noster*, then Jacques spoke again.

"Why have you brought me here? It will be a dark message that I take back to your cousin Charles of Burgundy."

"I'll find another messenger to save you trouble." Then with a change of humor and more directly: "They say that Lord Howard and his English sit at Dover. Eh? What are they waiting for?"

"Does Louis name me counselor?"

"Burgundy is to raise an army. That cousin of mine, Jacques, asking your pardon, is a fool. If the English wait on him, they 'll sit at Dover until the spring. The English are hard of learning. He 'll keep a trollop's faith with them. I 'll pass these things. They concern you only a very little. My guests hear slight rummage from the world outside. It 's a sweet cloister I 've set you in.

"Gruel?" Louis had noticed the dishes. "What a flavor! Blessed Madonna, I love a carrot. We 'll pamper you. If your teeth last, we 'll have you fat. Baluc's, most unconsiderate, fell out. And we 'll have no questions asked until to-morrow. My curiosity must wait on your digestion. I 've playthings in a room above. The best playtime is in the morning. We 'll have the pretty playthings out to-morrow. Good night and sweet dreams!"

The King took up the light. He was so game-some that his back forgot to ache. Then he paused. Something outside had struck his ear.

"I came down to-night to press matters a little, Jacques. No matter. I 've changed my mind. To-morrow will do. You 'll tell me what I want when I get the playthings out."

Again he paused and cocked his head, with a step nearer to the door.

“You ’ll like this room in the morning, Jacques. If the day is bright, a shiver of it sticks in the window, although it is not enough to waken you. It ’s snug for sleep. Eh? Eh? What is that? Did you hear a sound?”

A tenseness had come on Louis—another mood of cat.

Outside was a low footfall. Some one was on the circular stairs, descending step by step. Then there was a fumbling with the lock—

I ’ll write no more to-night. Shall I sit up till dawn, while my head wags for sleep, just because you are curious who is on the stairs? Maybe it ’s Tristan, maybe it ’s myself, or Olivier le Daim, or Charles of Burgundy, or Judas Iscariot, or the Pope.

To-morrow I ’ll tell who it was. Snuff out your candle! Let ’s go to bed!

CHAPTER XXXII

AN ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE

THE guardsman ran bawling from the room.
I was alone with Diane.

She had followed to the window and had screened her eyes to see into the darkness. Then she ran to me. Kneeling she cut my cords.

"Be quick!" she cried. "It's all a trick. I have thrown them off."

"What would you have me do?" I was eager at her words.

"Do? Escape—get away—to Italy—anywhere."

"What of you, Diane? Do you come too?"

"No. I am safe here. The Queen protects me. She will send me with an escort into Burgundy. But enough evil for my sake has come to you. Drop through that window! To the town! By daylight you must be thirty miles off. Be quick! The guard will return!"

"I'll not be thrust off. I have not stolen a spoon," I said. "Think on these things better. We'll find some contrivance for your brother."

Diane had taken me by the arm to force me out, but I set myself a post.

“Have you any plan, Diane?”

“Ay, Sarto, but you have no part in it.”

“By God, young woman, you ’ll tell me of your plan! If there is betterment in it, we ’ll play it out together.”

“It is my plan, Sarto, to find the King, to ask for Jacques’s life. This morning there would have been no hope in it, but to-night the King will be of soft resolution now that the Virgin has come to life. I can win him best alone. Your going too would muddle it.”

“And where will you find the King?”

“He has gone to his dungeons. I shall follow him there.”

“To-night?”

“Now. Before his ecstasy passes.”

“You could not get to the dungeons, dear lady. The guards would not admit you.”

A look of triumph came on Diane’s face. “I have a safe-conduct from the Queen.”

“A safe-conduct. There ’s thought in that. Is it made in your name?”

“It ’s blank. But you cannot serve me. Sarto, I beg that you be off at once.”

"Does the Queen know how you would use it? It's rare that she sets herself against the King."

"You waste your speech, Sarto."

Diane pulled upon my sleeve to force me to the window. I sat down upon a stool.

"I'll not be packed off so, Diane. You had best tell me how I can serve you."

"Dear Sarto—" she began, then her voice broke. She put her hands upon my shoulders. "If you bear me any love, go!" she said. "Go, in the name of God!"

I put off her hands. "Mademoiselle," I cried, "you waste our time for action."

Diane left me. She stood with her back turned against me, and she twitched at the coverlet of the table. Then abruptly she faced me. Her voice was harsh. "Be off, Sarto," she said, "I'll suffer no further question. You are a fool, Monsieur. I have tricked you to my purpose. Must a woman speak more plainly? You have been dangling around me long enough. I want none of your attentions. I am betrothed elsewhere. You had best be off."

I arose from my stool and stared at her.

"Betrothed?" I said. "To whom?"

"It does not concern you, Monsieur. My word is enough."

"Diane," I said, "perhaps I dream. Did you tell me that you are betrothed?"

"Ay, Sarto. You had best be off." But her eyes fell before mine.

"You lie, Diane," I cried. "You are not betrothed."

I put my fingers beneath her chin and held up her head to mine. Tears stood in her eyes. "Sarto's your lover, Mademoiselle. The only one whose suit will prosper. Do you confess the lie?"

Diane twisted from my grip. Then her purpose faltered. "Ay, Sarto," she said reluctantly, "it is a lie." I had thought to save your life." Impulsively she touched my cheek.

And now a thought that had come to me when she first mentioned the safe-conduct came to me again. There was shrewd contrivance in it. For a few moments I ranged up and down to think upon it. It was a plan to bring off Motier. But at what cost? Across my brain, at this, there came the beloved rumble of the Roman streets. "At what cost," I thought. Then I gripped my

resolution, and with a swing of arm waved off all fear and consequence. "God's face," I thought, "shall I be a frightened haggler when fate itself has goods to sell? I'll plank down the price and take my purchase."

My spirits mounted and I cried aloud, "Diane!" and I strode forward upon her. "Your pass, Mademoiselle," was all I said, but I took her by the wrist.

In affright she held the crumpled bit of paper and stretched her arm behind her to guard it from me. Her eyes met mine and they searched them deep. Her fear was gone. "It is I, Diane," I said, "who am going to find not the King, but Motier. I have a plan to bring him off."

Thus we stood—I a soldier, with my strong arms, before this slight French girl. Quickly I seized her left hand and drawing her to me, until her hair touched my face, I slipped my hand along her right arm. It was bare and my blood danced at the touch. My hand met the fingers behind her. These I clasped and drew them back, one by one, until the paper fell to the stones. She stood before me and when the paper fell, her fingers lay in mine.

Then somewhat of Italian burst from my lips,

wherein I called her dearest and summoned hills and sun for witness. "Diane," I said, "your eyes are the only stars that I need in heaven." And much more I said, but I'll not write it down, lest some botcher after me translate my words into some kennel language like Dutch or English. And did the lady understand my Italian speech? God pity her, she knew not the language, but be content, she was a woman.

And time passed upon us thus, my arms about Diane—she standing close for shelter. Then I bent down and kissed her, and she knew all that was in my heart—this French girl, with a light in her eyes which no one shall describe.

Suddenly there came a harsh sound. Men were moving in the entry outside. There was a clatter, also, on the stones along the garden, and lanterns moved outside the windows.

Now I have said that there were windows on both sides of the room. It was to the farther side I turned, to the windows that overlooked the town. There was, I noticed, a narrow ledge before the wall pitched off dizzily to the town below.

There was a sound of men coming up the steps from the entry, and then a nearer sound at the door. "This may be the last good-by, Diane.

May the Virgin keep you!" I drew her within my arms and kissed her lips.

There was a rattling at the door. "Quick!" she whispered.

Already it seemed too late. The doorway was cut off. The windows to the garden offered sure capture. But below the windows that overlooked the town there was the narrow ledge.

Quietly I swung open the window. Diane followed close. "I pray for you, Luca Sarto," was her only speech.

Crouching on the sill, I kissed her finger-tips, her knees and her skirt as it hung against her ankles. And words came hot for utterance. "Diane, my beloved." Then I dropped to the narrow ledge.

And now that I have written it and you've read it, know that it is the truth. Not a word have I put down but what was spoken. And much more of it I'd write, except that you would babble it. For it would tease me like a fuzzy shift to think that my words might be made a common ballad and sung upon the streets. Sorry I am to have written even this much, for our converse was somewhat sweet, and in print too apt to cloy. When I've read others' scenes of love, either in chronicle

or sonnet, I have wished for Spanish lemons to squeeze a little sourness on the words. Yet it's truth I write.

Once on the ledge, I ran along it, thus keeping in the building's shadow. Momentarily I expected to hear my pursuers. They could have cut me off when I came into the open space beyond the palace. But everything was quiet. It seemed hardly possible that no one started in pursuit; and yet it was so, by the cleverness of Diane.

No sooner had I dropped from the window than Diane closed it. Then as the sounds thickened at the door, she took from the table a Book of Hours. When the guards were about to break through the paneling, she threw this against a window toward the garden, that is, against a window opposite to the one by which I had escaped.

It broke the glass which clattered to the stones. Then as the guards rushed in, she cried out excitedly. "There, there, through that window! To the garden!"

It was so cleverly acted and the circumstances seemed to fit so nicely, that the men went in the wrong direction and I was alone on the ledge with the Queen's pass in my poke.

As for Diane, I'll write you but a page.

When the guards had run out and were beating in the bush, Diane went to her room. But she did not give herself to idleness or lamentation. For some few minutes she knelt upon her knees, praying to the Virgin. Then her prayer fell off, but still she knelt and thought. The tirewoman, meantime, wept in the corner until the stones were wet.

At last Diane looked up from her prayers, and on her face a new plan showed. It was a potent plan, rich in promise, yet she gave no hint of it in speech.

But then she clouded. "Holy Virgin," she whispered, "I have not strength to do it." She knelt again before her crucifix and presently her purpose cleared. "Blessed Mary," she prayed aloud, "forgive me for what I am about to do. It's sacrilege, but it's the only way."

Her determination was made, and she arose.

"Marie," she said.

The maid held up her head.

"You had best go to bed, Marie. I've no further need of you to-night."

The maid went off. Diane set the catch behind her.

Now mark what she did! First she went

a-runmage in her chest of clothes, and laid out this and that garment. Certain gear she chose at last, all of white. And yet to name the pieces is a woman's task. But what does Diane with these? One would think there was to be a dance or rigadoon. Yet the darkness of the castle gives denial. Nor was there any squeak of viol or blowing on a pipe. Too bleak and sodden was the palace for any frisk of feet. If to such dull halls Merriment came, she must have been a sullen wench.

Yet Diane held another purpose as she clothed herself. This purpose I'll keep to myself, nor will I seek to spy longer in her room.

Once in the open air, my thoughts leaped to my own concerns, and the foolhardiness of my errand came to me. Of my own will I was going into a dungeon from which I might never return. Since Dante went to hell, there had been no descent of greater hazard. Yet it served with merit, for it kept Diane from the perils of the guardroom and the winding steps.

I rounded the end of the building and came into the garden. Off to the right a bow-shot's distance were the lights of my pursuers as they beat the shrubbery. I trotted on and passed the

Church of Saint Ours. It showed a single light. A man was crouching in the shadow. It was too late to avoid him, so I passed him on the far side of the path.

"Michel, you rogue," I cried, "what a scare you gave me!"

I was eased to know that it was he. We sat together on a stone, and I got my breath.

"Michel," I said, "I'm going into the dungeons."

Michel turned a scared face at me.

"And when I come out, we'll start for Italy."

"Ay, Master, and the fly had plans also, before the spider caught him."

I cuffed him and bade him hold his peace. "Michel," I said, "you'll take this gold and with it you'll buy fast horses. Four of them. You'll have them within the hour upon the bridge above the Indre. Have no fear for me, but do as I tell you."

"Ay."

"Within an hour—four horses—on the bridge."

"Ay, Master."

I looked hard at him. His head was wagging from side to side most disconsolately. "Cheer yourself," I said. "There was never yet a hawk

caught in a spider's web. The mesh is spun too thin. I'll flap through somehow. Now be off with you!"

I watched him until he was gone from sight. Then it came on me suddenly that I was unarmed.

From every point you take it, I was in a sad position.

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHO TRAVELS FAR, WILL DISAPPEAR

MY spirits sank at the odds against me. Fate had thrown sixes on the board. Should even one of my dice roll to a five or less, Fate the hag would take me by the throat. Even now her fingers itched for the task. I was in danger of satisfying the proverb: Who travels far, will disappear. Here would be an end of my wanderings. Hereafter, the walls of Italy would starve for my brush. The Sistine would go blank. And yet it 's not in Luca Sarto's star to be snuffed out so. To him hope keeps babbling. There is a firm conjunction of the planets that he shall not be swung off to his Maker on a gibbet, or nibbled to death by dungeon rats.

Michel had gone. I stood alone, weaponless, in the darkness of the grove of lime trees. There was a wind, and it moaned through the trees as though nature felt kindly toward me, yet despaired.

My pass was a sufficient warrant for gaining en-

trance to Motier's dungeon. Once there I would flaunt before the guardsmen the King's ring, given me in Paris when I had brought back the lead saint. It would be potent to my purpose. Tall boasting words would be needed also—but I knew them—an insolent authority, a dispatch and what not, as though I bore majestical royalty on my tongue. I could play the part like the best actor that ever ranted in an inn yard. It would appear that the King had sent me from the palace to bring Motier to him to be quizzed. Would not a finger ring of the King and a safe-conduct of the Queen stretch so far? A handful of gold, too, would aid credulity. But if this failed despite my bluster, I might still bribe the guardsman to let me change places with Motier. I'd tell him that Motier had been captured in the dark, that no one in authority had seen him yet, except Tristan, and he only by a lantern. It would appear that he had been mistaken in his man, that in the confusion he had arrested me. No blame, therefore, would fall upon the guardsman and he'd be the richer by the gold. To persuade Motier to make the change, I would invent some dire danger to his sister. Slim of course. But I would put pepper in the trial.

As for myself—at worst I would, in the days to come, scratch Madonnas on the walls and die of rot.

Presently I came from the denser grove. The dungeon towers stood black against the clouds. My thoughts went back to Father Paul. “Your banded spider,” he had said, “when it is old in wisdom, spins its web across the paths of darkness.”

I advanced through the tangle of grass toward the towers. As I came near, my teeth chattered with cold and fear and excitement. To hide my state, I kicked loudly against an outer door, for a faint heart cloaks itself in noise. Then I waited.

A little fat man cautiously opened the door, and stood squinting at me, holding a light above his head. He was tousled and greased and foul like Gluttony in the Mystery when it’s acted. And if it interest you, this same fat man was the original of my Silenus in the Pitti. I thrust the ring beneath his eye, and demanded in the King’s name that he lead me to that abominable traitor, Jacques Motier.

For a moment he hesitated.

“What, you bag of husks,” I cried, “is it not

enough?" I thrust my safe-conduct at him. "It's the word of the King and the word of the Queen. Let me pass!"

He wrinkled his forehead upon the paper like a scholar when he sets his glosses in a text. Yet slight value his glosses would have had, for the paper dangled from his ignorant fingers upside down, like a tavern acrobat.

At last he nodded on it and drew me to the guardroom door, which being open, bad smells came out. With such a breath the building must have a foul indigestion. "The calomel is cure," I thought, and held my nose and went within the maw.

At first the fat man was for calling others to consult with him. I prodded him to ease him of the thought. "Make haste," I said. "The King waits. 'If a sleek comely man comes to the gate,' it's what the King said, 'you'll get the best dispatch. He'll have wit to recognize my ring.'"

The flattery served.

Beyond the guardroom was a passage, and some distance in, beyond hearing unless the voice be raised in fright, were circular stairs descending into a well. From such a bowel, I thought, there would be need of strong emetic to cast me forth.

My guide stopped now and then and put his fingers on his lips. I listened but could hear nothing. Still he would not go on. During a minute we were silent, and then we began the descent again.

"Sh!" he whispered, "do you hear voices?"

There was a sound below, but I could not tell whether it was a voice or only some animal in the walls. Then the sound ceased.

"It is n't the first time," he cried, and shrank back against the wall. "I have heard it before, and so I never come here at night."

He shivered so that the lantern jiggled. From below came the same monotone as before. It ceased again.

And now, despite my urging, he declined to go farther. Even when I tapped my toe in his fat seat, as he stood below me on the stairs, it failed of its intent. Through so thick a cushion my message mounted dully to his head.

Then the idea occurred to me that if I played upon his fears, I could persuade him to give me his keys. They would be ample substitute for himself. But no persuasion was necessary. At the first hint, Silenus dropped his ring of keys and

sprang up the stairs. I reached out to clutch his leg.

"You fool," I cried; "leave the light with me!"

I caught him by the foot. It tripped him and he fell. The lantern was extinguished and it rattled down the steps. We were in pitchy darkness, broken by not so much light as issues from a tippler's nose.

I could hear him above me, panting. I could have struck him in my anger. "You hutch of dropsies," I called, "wait for my return!"

I stood up and reached out to touch the outer rounding wall. "Does Motier's dungeon lie at the bottom of this shaft?"

"Ay, Monsieur, it does. It's three times round, and there's the door."

With much grunting, the fat man got upon his feet. He scuttled up the steps and was gone.

Step by step I descended. Once I put my fingers on a grill. I put my ear upon the opening. There was no sound, until on a sudden I heard a sneeze—a shriveled little sneeze as though there were dregs only in the pipes. It was horrible to hear in that hole of darkness anything so human.

And now I went twice round the shaft as I

judged it—forty-six steps—and was at the bottom. My extended fingers touched something of wood, a door that blocked my further progress. It was solid, without grill. Passing my fingers down its surface, I came upon a chain and lock. I put my ear against the door. There was no sound. Then I inserted my great key, turned it, pushed open the door—and stood face to face with Jacques Motier and the King of France.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I TRY A FALL WITH THE KING

THERE was a lantern on the stones, its light cast up as if for a play or interlude. Behind it, with its glare on him, was the King, legs straddled though touching at the knees, head up and eyebrows raised, jaw snapped shut, hand upon his sword, face clouded—puzzled by my interruption. Motier stood new-risen from his stool, with his head craned across his shoulder. His fingers were clutched upon his doublet, and his face was white. As for myself, judge my bafflement!

The King was the first to speak. He was grinning now. "To what do I owe this pleasure, Luca Sarto?"

Before I spoke, I went down upon my knees, hat in hand. "Evil's been worked against me, your Majesty. I have come to you for justice."

"Justice?" Louis smirked. "You had best beg for mercy. A gallows' rope is justice."

"Sire, you are mistaken in me."

But Louis broke in, "Save your breath, Sarto!"

I persisted, "Cardinal Rovere will take it ill if mischance falls on his friend."

"I'll act upon your hint. My legate shall be instructed it was an illness took you off."

"Heart of God, your Majesty, why do you vent yourself on me?"

Louis ignored the question. He stroked his chin, making a wry face. "Young man," he said at length, "it puzzles me how you got entrance to me."

"Cardinal Rovere will be much amazed—" I persisted.

"Hold your tongue!"

The King's grin was gone. His mouth was set and hard. To no purpose had I scuffed upon my knees. Foul roads there blocked my advance through humility. I must go another way. I rolled my eyes up ceilingward.

"King Louis," I said, "to-night the Virgin has been gracious to you. For her sake will you not spare your enemies?"

Louis stood for a moment in thought, and he crossed himself. Then a wolfish look came in his face. "Luca Sarto," he snarled, "to-morrow I'll hang you on a gibbet."

There was a slough on this road too. I must go still another way.

"Motier," I said, and I pointed to the iron gate that stood open across the dungeon, "where does that passage lead?"

"It's so the King came in," he replied. "It's an egress from the dungeons."

Louis stood against the farther wall, his cat's eye on me. At the mention of the passage, he stirred himself. He pointed to the stool. "Sit there, Sarto! I'll hear you!"

As I turned half way, he made a sudden move to pass me and gain the grating. I blocked his approach. "Sire," I said, "Sarto will not sit before the King of France."

Louis flashed a look of anger at me. If he had intended to leave the dungeon through the grating, I had cut him off.

And now I had planned to leap on Louis, but on looking closely at his left hand half concealed in his clothing, I saw a knife in his fingers. His right hand held a sword, the point resting on the stones. I had best keep off. Motier stood at my elbow.

"Motier," I said, "close the door I came in by!" He did so on full-stretched chain. "Now lock

it!" He hesitated, but I swore an oath and he obeyed.

"On my soul," said Louis—but he was for a moment puzzled—"you are as careful to lock the door as an old housewife. Do you fear thieves in the cupboard?"

I twitched the key in my fingers.

Louis laughed at me. "You underset my wit, young man. I need no guardsman to protect me. See how I guard myself!"

He advanced the point of his sword until it rested against my throat. Then he pressed me back against the wall, scratching my throat until he had drawn blood.

"Give me the key," he said.

I tossed it to the floor. If Louis stoops to get it, I thought, I shall leap on him.

Louis looked sidewise at the key as though he coveted it, and at me sharply, for he had read my thoughts.

"Your manners, young man, are foul," he said. "Hand me the key." But I watched him narrowly, for some guile was working in him.

Then I saw his trick too late. On a sudden he flicked the key with the side of his foot, and sent it spinning across the stones in the direction of the

door. It jounced upon its course and slid out of sight through the crack beneath.

"Messieurs," said Louis and he smiled broadly, "I've scored a goal. The game is done. I bid you good night. Both of you will now lie snug here until the morrow."

Louis backed carefully away from me and came before the grating. His hand was on it.

"Stay, your Majesty!" I cried, for our only hope of escape lay in holding him on some pretext. Were the grating once shut and Louis gone upon his business, our plight was desperate.

Louis hesitated. Already he was outside the grill and was closing it. But the cat was uppermost in him. It would please him to cuff once more the mice that he had caught.

During these seconds I saw but two things, the King's smirk and his glittering steel. Yet my thoughts leaped as in a race. Thoughts, remembrances, plans, galloped through my head until it spun like a chariot wheel. But from all this confusion, by a strange chance, there emerged the remembrance of Louis as I had seen him first in Paris, in the Tournelles, when the thought of death had plagued him. Blood was wet on my throat, and the King's grin was before me.

"King Louis," I asked, "have men ever bought their lives?" I watched his face.

"With what kind of coin?" he asked.

"The confession is long. Have you the patience to hear it?"

"Confession, Sarto?"

"Have you patience for my confession, King Louis?"

"It 's meager in me, Sarto."

"Then I shall not begin."

"What would you tell me?" he asked.

"My tongue should be torn out," I cried. "It is base to betray one's friends." I watched Louis to see whether I had aroused any interest.

"Ah," said Louis, "do you wish to tell me about your friends in Italy?"

I hung my head, then nodded.

"Then," said Louis, "make a start!"

"And you 'll hold in confidence that it was I who betrayed these matters?"

"It 's as you wish," he said. "Tell me quickly what you will, before I tire! Perhaps it 's about the Pope and Burgundy. Come, young man, speak while the humor is in me to listen!"

"Well," I said, "if it must be. My life 's the reward."

"If what you tell me is worth it."

"It's the Church—things that are known only if one sets his ear at a keyhole."

"How shall these things profit me?"

"I shall tell you."

"Be on your way, Sarto! If what you tell me has value, I shall set you free."

I knew that he lied. Nothing that I might betray would save me. My wits were my only guard. Motier's lip curled in scorn. "You play the cur," he whined, "and to no purpose." He turned from me and squatted down upon the stool, with his head sunk in his hands.

"I live in Rome," I began. "I am friends with the churchmen."

"Ah," said Louis, "there's the wind."

"Ay, your Majesty. Once I journeyed to Milan. It was Pope Paul sent me. Papal business, your Majesty!"

I tapped my breast to indicate that important papers were on my person at the time of it.

"The Sforza live in Milan. Bona of Savoy, my kinswoman, married Galeazzo Maria." This from King Louis.

"I was delayed and it seemed that the night would come before I reached the city. It was a

warm summer night, with a low-hanging moon, frayed and ragged—a clear night, without clouds—no clouds for weeks, and the land steaming and cracking. I traveled alone on a jaded horse. Night had closed against the fields and there was nothing ahead but the lights of a village, and a greater light that blurred the darkness. This greater light was a fire burning in a field, and a crowd of men moved about it. In the red glow was a scaffold of wood, and joiners were at work with a tapping of hammers.

“I called to them. ‘Who is to be the crows’ meat?’ I asked.

“‘It’s Benedetti’s scaffold,’ they cried back. ‘He’s to be hanged in the morning.’ The gibbet’s shadow lay like a cross in the road before me. The tapping of hammers fell off behind.

“As I reached the city, I passed workmen with tools on their shoulders, coming back from their day’s work. ‘Who is Benedetti?’ I asked. ‘Benedetti was Prefect,’ they said; ‘he is to be hanged in the morning.’ They passed on laughing.

“I entered the city and came before a drinking place. There were lights at the chinks of the shutters and a noise within. I listened to a rat-

tle of cups. I put my head at the door. 'Why do they hang this Benedetti?' I cried.

"A drunkard's breath blew in my face. 'God! I'll spit on Benedetti's corpse to-morrow.'"

King Louis shifted his feet. "Hurry!" he exclaimed. "Your story grows tiresome."

I looked at Louis. He waited expectant for what I might say of Galeazzo Maria.

"Perhaps I have told enough," I said. "And yet there are things to come. I'll speak of Pope Paul presently, and then, if you've patience, of your brother Charles."

"What of Charles?"

At this Motier blurted out: "Hold your peace, Sarto! Must you have others to swing upon your gibbet?"

Louis made a gesture of impatience, and I continued the narrative.

"By and by I stood before gloomy walls, black and lifeless, for the ragged moon had set. A man passed in the shadow of a building. 'Yo, ho, what's this?' I cried. 'It's the dungeons,' he replied. I pulled upon a bell cord. Chains rattled, and a man as gray and shabby as a rat popped out his head. He snarled upon me for breaking up

his sleep. And now, your Majesty, I come to the point. Through my acquaintance with the churchmen I was admitted. I wished to see and speak with this Benedetti, who once had been a friend of Burgundy. Burgundy! Before the body was hung up to rot, there were secrets to be had."

I glanced at Louis intently. His jaw was less tightly compressed. His position was unchanged—hand on the grating—but he had lost assurance. He was held to my story, and for reasons beside the prospect of learning forbidden things. But my hope was still forlorn.

"An artist, sire," I said, "must know the look of things. He was a little man, this Benedetti, with a stooped figure and black suit. He wore a cap pulled forward on his eyes. Like yours, your Majesty. And his face was thin. And as the priests and I stood before him, they told him he must die."

"Stop!" Louis cried. "I've heard enough!"

"Not yet," I said. "This is the very point. It's what Benedetti is to say. It's treason—treason—plots with Burgundy and Guienne against the throne of France."

Motier, still upon his stool, looked up. "You

smirch your honor, Sarto. Peace! It will not save you."

The King's sword trembled. Yet I held him to my tale.

"The priests told Benedetti that he must be hanged at daybreak." I grasped my throat and bent it forward to drive home my hideous meaning. For so they hang at Montfaucon, head forward.

"He, too, this Benedetti, spanned his throat with his fingers, and pressed his nails into the flesh to know beforehand what the horror would be like. He was a little man, your Majesty. About your size."

"Why do you tell me this?" the King cried.

"A minute more. He will talk presently. And then you will hear about this treason of Guienne.

"When is it to be?" asked Benedetti.

"The scaffold is in the fields!" they cried. "All the night the joiners have been at work. It is four hours until the morning."

"Then the terror of Benedetti was loose. He buried his fingers in the flesh of his throat until the color started in his face. And he shrieked and fell to the floor. Then the priests kicked him

until he rolled to the wall and lay there, panting, with a dirty sweat upon him."

"Stop!" cried the King. He leaned back against the stones and drew his hand across his face. It was his left hand, for his sword was still extended.

I went on faster and more excitedly, for I was summoning a demon to my aid.

"An old man, this Benedetti, like you, and hated. And he lay in his sweat against the wall when they left him. In the dark."

"Stop!" The King's face was a marvel. It had changed from a sneer, to interest, to anger, and lastly to fear. Fear! Do you remember that night in Paris when I had frightened the King by talking to him of death? I bade you mark it to the better understanding of my tale.

The time had come for proof. I threw my arms aloft and yelled aloud. "By the teeth of God, Louis, the monster Death—it stands behind you!"

An awful look came on Louis's face. He shriveled at the sound and his humped back shook.

But then, 'fore God, he did not turn as I had hoped.

Had he for an instant taken his glance from me,

I had leaped on him. His knees clapped, but he kept his gaze. His sword point was still level with my breast. My players' rant had failed.

On Louis's face there came a look of understanding. "Sarto," he sneered, "there's been a mummer spoilt. You speak your lines rarely. You shame Cambyzes." He advanced to the grating. His hand was on it. He went through and drew it shut behind him.

In the silence I heard Balue coughing. It was a cough grown thin with damp. And the gnawing of a rat I heard upon the stairs.

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CHAPTER XXXV

HOW THE KING'S PRAYERS WERE ANSWERED

I HAD mouthed to no avail. And now in my rage I had blasphemed, had not a weakness seized me and a dryness come upon my tongue. The King stood beyond the grating, and on his face there grew a sneer of understanding what guile and malpractice I had stirred him with. His eyes were shining green as the lantern fell athwart them, green like a hungry wolf. And some toothed and snarling words he uttered, but I marked them not, standing all limp with the blood a-trickle from the scratches on my throat. My tale of gibbeting now turned inward on myself, and I shuddered.

It was thus for several minutes, or longer, for aught I know. I shut my eyes, that so I might keep out the sight of the King. I tottered against the wall, and through my dullness there pierced the cold and damp.

Some time passed, and now the taunting words had ceased. I stood in a daze, daring not to open

my eyes. All sounds were gone, but those of rats and water. Had the King spent his fit? Had he gone off and left us buried? Yet there had been no rattle of the gate.

I opened my eyes. As before, there arose the dungeon wall, the iron grating, and the darkness beyond.

But the King! I looked and thought I dreamed. This is what I saw. Marvel at my amazement! In front of me, almost in touch, on his knees, I saw the King—his cap of saints laid before him on the stones—and beside him I saw Motier, both of them praying. Nor is that all. Was I crazed? Had fear so shaken me? Mark the greater wonder!

The agonizing prayer of Louis had been answered. In the doorway, as I turned, the Virgin stood—the blessed Virgin of Saint Ours.

The day of days had come! Her nod and promise were fulfilled. And this for a hunchback's piping prayers. She was white garmented, with a blue mantel set about her shoulders, and on her head was the golden crown that I remembered to have seen before, while yet she stood in lifeless stone. Thus had come the day of wonders to which her former nod had made attest.

And wondrous would be this day to all succeeding generations, for it had come to pass that again the Virgin walked on her blessed feet and touched men to make them whole.

"Maria," I cried, "save me from my sins!" And down I went, too, upon my knees. The Virgin spoke not a word, but she touched Louis on the arm. A radiance fell about her, and she cast no shadow from the lantern.

She touched Louis on the arm and with a gesture she bade him hold his peace. Then Motier she touched and then myself. But I dropped my eyes before her glance, down to her sandaled feet.

It was my face she touched and her fingers were warm.

When I lifted my eyes she had turned away. She stood at the iron grating for an instant, then lifted her garment to prevent it catching on the broken sill. Then she was gone from sight. Louis still mumbled his prayers and rocked upon the stones.

And now while the daze of exaltation was still upon the others, into my senses leaped the present world. And into me there came a ray of light—a beam from my wisdom. Be your scandal what it may, I laughed—but inwardly and not aloud.

Then striding forward I kicked the weapons beyond Louis's reach and picked them up—his sword and Turkish poniard. Again I laughed as the light came stronger, while still, as in a fog of night, these others crouched upon their knees.

I saw light, and in many guises. Of this vision first. I had seen her sandals, mark you, when I had bowed my head in prayer, and they were unlike those of the stone image in the church. Her stockings were white, with blue clocks that showed an inch when she crossed the sill. And I remembered that I had seen these blue clocks before, in other circumstance. Nor were her fingers long and thin. Nor tall her figure. So, like water in the stone, reason trickled in and cracked the whole. And so, I thought, where my players' rant had failed, another's wit had served. Thereat I would have cried aloud in glee, except that caution silenced me.

"Rejoice, sire!" I cried. I held now all the weapons. "Rejoice! Your prayers have found an answer."

But the King spoke nothing. He rocked and mumbled and kissed the lead saints that lay upon the stones.

I gazed into Louis's face. It was the face of

one lost in the dark ways of prayer and wonder. Me he saw not, only the vision for which so often he had gone on pilgrimage. The fulfillment of this buried all things else. Into the ocean-sea had Louis gone, beyond the furthest glimmer of the Canaries. There, they say, the world slopes off, and as yet there came no eastward wind of reason to blow him up the steep. It was a dark void that lay about him, for the very stars were dim, so far in ocean was he sundered.

I regarded steadfastly the face of this man who had planned and sinned and schemed and suffered, who had looked on the mystery of death and who now had seen a vision. An artist must know the look of men. Some day I shall mix the blacks and grays, and my fingers will fret to seize my brushes, and my brain will beat and throb. Then look to your laurels, O mighty Giotto, for the walls of Rome shall be my witness. My shadows still lie westward. All's to come!

And now I had gone poking with my dagger into Louis's ribs—I itched thereto—but consideration came that a villain's blood should not be let while he's crouched in prayer. Had once his mumbling ceased I had paid him off. Any pause—a sneeze—would have been his death.

And yet I feel shame that my better impulse was thus fobbed. It would have been a sweeter France.

Then I aroused Motier and, with the key of Silenus I loosed his chains. We crossed the cell to the grating through which the vision had departed. We passed through and set the bolts.

Now for the last time I looked upon the King—praying and wagging on his knees. And I bade him keep to his prayers, for other sounds would avail him nothing. Though he roared like the winds from all five seas, no mortal ear could hear him. It was eight hours to breakfast time, when the jailor would come down with porridge. If then the mists were off the King, what a blast he'd get when he put the black bread beneath Louis's nose.

So we left him, rocking back and forth, kissing his cap of saints. Who shall say it was not the perfectest hour the King had known for many a year?

May seventeenth it was, in the year fourteen seventy-one. Set it down that on that night the Madonna came to life. And let this be told to all who come on pilgrimage, that for the repetition of the marvel their prayers be stretched from morn to

night. But let it not be told that the Madonna walked in sandals of this present mode, or that she wore stockings with blue clocks upon them. Had Sarto been a Frenchman, he too would have kept upon his knees and mumbled and rocked himself. It was his Italian nose that sniffed the imposition out.

Once safe through the grating, I shook Motier by the shoulder and badgered him, for I could not have him so amazed when work was to be done and wit was needed. It was not until Diane appeared, still dressed as the virgin, and had spoken to him and called him "Jacques" and "silly brother," that he saw the truth, but not then without a trembling. Had I not clapped him on the back, he would still have gone upon his knees to her.

And now, although I thirsted for the knowledge of how Diane had contrived the imposition, action and speed were our first necessity.

Behind us the King's candle burned. At the turn I stopped. "Listen, Diane," I said. "Louis still grunts his prayer to you."

"Peace, Sarto," she answered; "your raillery is ill-timed. God spare me! I've done sacrilege to-night." She hurried on.

Before us stretched a rough stone passage, strewn about with litter. Presently there were steps, and then a door. Beyond was a room with swept flagging, and with an altar set with figures—a kind of chapel. Yet on the wall there hung a sword. Even if it had been Saint Michael's I would have stolen it. It was a Milan blade with a fine whip to it. Thus Motier and I both were armed. Another door opened against circular stairs, which we climbed. Here was still another door, but Diane had the key. I listened like a fox at the top of his hole, but hearing nothing, I swung it open. We were inside the church of Saint Ours. We had issued from Louis's secret passage.

The church was empty but not in darkness, for a dozen tapers burned about the Madonna's statue. They had been set there when Louis first saw the nodding in the dusk. Such miracles had happened since! Silent stood the Madonna, nor seemed to heed that her golden crown was gone, and the azure mantel from her shoulders.

You have not found Sarto with much mumble on his lips. His thoughts, for the most part, are on the world. On his lips canzonets have sounded oftener than anthems. His mouth is not

solemn enough to fit an alleluia. Yet, coming suddenly on the lights, the glory of it burst on him, and he knelt down upon the stones.

As for Diane, she was all amazed. What things she had done within the hour! It makes Sarto, even, marvel how she had strength for such sacrilege. For aught he knows, the azure mantel had never been touched before except by the hands of priests and by pilgrims' lips. Yet Diane had set it on herself as though her women's fingers had made the seams.

And now she put all back, placing the crown upon the Virgin's head and laying the mantel on, together with all else of jewels and beads. Abasement and fear were on her. She kissed the garment at the hem, then bowed her head against the stones. "Mother of God," she cried, "Blessed Virgin, visit me not with thy wrath!" And much more, her words piteous.

At last I roused her. Speed was needed.

"May God forgive me, Sarto. I had not done it except that the Queen told me my face was like the blessed Virgin's."

"So it is, dear lady," I answered.

We went into the night, and we looked on the stars we had thought we would not see again.

Vega rode brightest. But also I knew the Bear and the Northern Star that hangs off its points.

We dipped our fingers in the holy water at the door. Then we hurried on.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A SONG FOR TWO VOICES—WITH ACCOMPANIMENT

ALTHOUGH it was late, there were still lights in the windows, for all the night would the wonder grow how the Virgin had been seen nodding in the dusk.

At the castle gate, after a fretful minute, a crutch came tapping, and a pale old man came out. He put his eyes a-squint upon our pass. Then with lifted voice, "*C'est bien,*" he called.

In answer from her window, his madame wife tossed down a key. We went through the gate, and it clattered shut. The warder climbed off to bed, grunting that his beauty sleep was broken. We ran down the hill.

A turn and we had come upon the bridge. Michel awaited us with horses, as I had bade him.

Above us loomed the dungeons. I thought that I marked the very spot upon the wall where Mortier was kept—and Balue, also, dying in his iron cage. One jagged battlement stood above the

rest, and seemed to point in defiance up to heaven.

We mounted our horses and the race began. We had six hours' start of Louis at the least, to take no account of the time he would lose in the first confusion of pursuit—whether we had gone east or south, and by what road. There would be a brawl of question. Seven hours' start.

My plan was the road that runs through Bourges and Autun. The fourth day would bring us to the Swiss border, where we would be safe.

We cantered off the bridge and turned our horses along a woodland road. And still the wind came singing through the trees. And it stirred me deep that so I rode and that beside me kept this woman—this Diane of the blue eyes, who but a few days since had stood upon the cold margin of my life. Quick she had entered in, and it drove me cold what speed the gods do have. It's but a snapping of their fingers—Poof!—and by Saint Agnes, it is done. Then rapt as I was, I thought of Father Paul, and smiled. It were convenient to have a priest at journey's end. But soft I kept my thoughts, and on we went. We passed a town or so and many streams. Always our road lay eastward.

But what thought this woman at my side?

Bide a while! The issue will show. The pasty of the feast is yet to come.

Under the wheel of night, slow turning, we journeyed on. And stars that had glinted first above our horses' ears, now rode high aloft. Time and ourselves sped on.

"Father Paul," I thought. And to my lips there came a song I'd heard on the streets of Paris, "*Vrai Dieu d'Amour*," with a tag of memory how lads and lasses had danced to it: And how, when the dance was done, their hands lay happily together. I hummed the tune, and although I knew not the words the poet had put therein, yet the name of Diane fitted to the lilt, and I was in felicity. Joshua had once stopped the sun. At my prayer might he not hold the stars as well and stretch out this contented night to years?

Then we clacked through a town, where a sleepy dog raised his nose and howled. No challenge else. We stopped but once, and this was to give our horses water. I tightened my horse's girth—then on, and still no time for speech with Diane.

Through the night we rode side by side. The sky was set with a thousand stars. The heavens, methinks, made a feast and lighted all their can-

dles in our honor. And the streams and wind were music for our betrothal. When wind and water play in concert they shame the pipe and fiddle.

And presently there came into the night the spirit of morning. The stars dimmed and the sky to the east was fading. The wind had fallen, and the earth lay hushed. As darkness sends shadows to announce its coming, and with its long dark fingers seizes on the world, in similar fashion the day, when it would proclaim itself, sets signal-fires upon the mountain tops. And to one let loose from Loches, the world seemed good and pure, fresh and beautiful.

At the foot of an incline we crossed a bridge above the sound of a running stream, and thence our way led up hill. The horses slowed to a walk. The cock gave trumpet to the dawn. The creature stood on tiptoe to catch the sun beyond the hills. And yet what were cocks and dawn to me—or the great round sun itself? Let the world grow black or light, all's one. Nor with Jacques did I feel concernment, whether he were near or far. If near, let him fall back, for I had words for Diane's ear alone!

"Look, Diane," I said, "the sun will be showing soon above the hills. It is coming out of Italy, and it has a welcome for us."

Diane turned and met my eyes. "A welcome for you, Sarto," she said slowly, "but I am Burgundian and I am going away from home."

"Home?" I repeated. "May not Italy be a home for both of us?"

Diane's eyes were on me still. They were as blue as the morning sky.

On the brow of the hill we drew rein. Below us lay a valley in misty garment. Up from the horizon long threads of light were stretched like Tyrian stuff, ready to weave the gorgeous fabric of the day.

"Diane," I said, "this France of yours has been good to me."

"Alas, Sarto, it has served you ill."

"Dearest," I said, "it has given me this night, this ride, this moment, and—"

"And for the asking, Luca Sarto, it has given you myself," she ended quietly.

I reached forth and touched her hand. "My beloved," I said, "there's a priest sits waiting in the mountains." I kissed her lips. A single star, unfaded in the west, was witness.

What has been written is but the prologue, and this has now an end. I tap upon the boards and close the curtain. I pack my pipes and viols. My doublets, cloaks and wigs I restore to the tireing box. I blow out the row of candles that have shined in the faces of my villains and my lady. Go out my door, I bid you, and seek a juggler to complete your entertainment. God knows my fingers are weary of the pen, and all besmudged with ink. In silence I leave the completion of my play.

Sweets and cabbage, you have them all. The oven's empty.

As for the brawl in France, it was in the evening twilight that we heard a trumpet before us on the road and saw presently a gleam of metal. "It's the men of Burgundy!" cried Jacques. "They go to smoke out Louis from his hole." For an hour the army passed us. Then we took the road again. It would now be the safer traveling. But for the adventures that befell us on our journey into Switzerland, not a word! It is enough that I showed my usual valor, and that we came safe off. And if by this omission you think I've cheated you, and that your entrance fee has been falsely paid, by God I'll stab you. You

have had your money's worth and enough.

As for this smudge that was darkening France and whether it smoked Louis off his gilded stool, go look it up yourself! You will have a better memory of it, if you blear your eyes upon a folio.

Madame Corday? On my soul I had forgotten her. She traveled to Loches with Louis, but I had not seen her there. She was a pleasant lady—but with a nurse's figure. Who knows? God may have granted her a husband with a blink.

Pope Paul? He died inside a month, and Rovere became his successor as Sixtus IV. It was a golden Rome for Sarto and Diane. I painted her beauty on a hundred walls.

As for Loches and the church upon the hill! To this day pilgrims—broken folk with rheums and gravel—mumble their prayers against the stones and kiss the hem of the Madonna's skirt. And priests tell how the Virgin once came to life and roamed the dungeons in the night.

Here I shall stop my history. I have laid forth my peddler's pack of words, have weighed and scrupled them like tradesmen's wares and, although there are stuffs and gauds I have not shown, I shut my pack.

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